

Cornerstone North East Fostering Service

Room 2, Oxford House, Sixth Avenue, Doncaster Finningley Airport, Doncaster DN9 3GG

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

Cornerstone North East Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency which has been registered with Ofsted since March 2006.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including respite, permanent, long-term, short-term and parent and child arrangements. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 18 fostering households that are caring for 20 children and young people.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 25 November 2019.

Visit dates: 14 to 15 December 2020

Previous inspection date: 27 February 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

Feedback from children is extremely positive about their experiences with their foster families. Children feel safe and are well cared for. They are suitably matched with foster carers who undergo thorough and timely assessments. Many children are either placed with a plan for permanence or with a plan for adoption. This provides children with a stable, secure family environment.

Children are welcomed into foster families and this enables them to build meaningful, trusting relationships with their carers. This is helping children to make progress and feel a part of the family.

Children are provided with child-friendly booklets that explain what fostering is about. These are separated into different age groups. They are well written and provide children with clear information and ways in which they can express their views. This supports their awareness and expectations prior to coming into foster care and enables them to feel listened to.

Children are supported to have contact with their family and others important to them. Their carers follow agreed plans. Some carers creatively engage younger children in arts and crafts to support family time. The use of a video-link helps families to actively engage with their children while they are playing. This has been used when the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have not allowed for face-to-face contact.

Carers understand the importance of children making progress in their education and their health. The introduction of a new recording system enables them to directly update the agency via a shared link to individual records. A carer said: 'We like the new systems.' This helps to monitor children's needs to ensure they are being met.

The safety of children

The agency follows the necessary protocols in relation to safeguarding concerns. This includes notifying the designated officer in the local authority when required. The agency did not notify Ofsted of an incident considered serious under regulation 36. This means that as a regulator, Ofsted has not had an opportunity to review the actions taken by the agency to ensure that they protect children from harm.

Children's risks are considered at the referral stage and during the matching process with the fostering family. Staff use this knowledge to support carers in implementing well-written safer caring policies. These are individualised and shared with children to support their understanding of boundaries, expectations and safe care in the family home. This contributes to a feeling of well-being and stability for children.

The foster family is supported through regular supervision and the supportive work that the supervising social workers do. A carer said: 'They really want the best for you and the children involved. We have a great relationship with our social worker and the rest of the team and we always know they are there to help and support.'

The manager has taken appropriate action since the last inspection to provide training to carers in physical intervention techniques and strategies to prevent injury to children. However, the inspectors found that not all carers understand and follow established policies. This leaves children potentially at risk of harm.

Leaders and managers

The agency's recruitment and selection process does not comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 or the Human Rights Act 1998. The agency only recruits foster carers in heterosexual marriages. The agency's policy on recruitment discriminates against potential carers of a different sexual orientation.

This is subject to an appeal at the Court of Appeal. A target date for hearing has been set for no later than 19 July 2021.

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and has vast experience of working in social care. She is highly regarded by her team, foster carers and others. She demonstrates a strong and supportive commitment to ensuring that children's progress is at the centre of her practice and that of her team. Supervising social workers spoke of her high expectations and of her being supportive.

Several carers spoken to during the visit commented on the 'excellent training' they have received during the COVID-19 pandemic. A carer said: 'Any time we have an issue or problem there is always somebody there at the end of the phone to offer advice and guidance. We have experienced nothing but the utmost professionalism in all our dealings with [the agency] and have felt valued and appreciated during our time with them.'

The fostering panel is chaired by an appropriately experienced person. He has enhanced his development by further training and attendance, as an observer, at other independent panels. The minutes show his effectiveness in ensuring that discussions are thorough, and that respect for members and attendees is adhered to. The fostering panel has maintained its role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, virtually.

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 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) (Regulation 17 (2))	31/03/2021
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. Any notification made in accordance with this regulation must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1)(2))	26/01/2021
Care Standards Act 2000 (338) An agency must be carried on in accordance with the relevant requirements. In this section "relevant requirements" means— the requirements of any other enactment which appear to the registration authority to be relevant. (Care Standards Act 2000, 14 (1)(c)(3)(b)) In particular, to comply with the enactment, sections 13, 19 and 29 of the Equality Act 2010 and section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 not to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in the recruitment of foster carers and to comply with the enactment, section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 not to discriminate on the grounds of religion and belief.	31/03/2021

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC066812

Registered provider: Cornerstone North East Fostering And Adoption Service

Responsible individual: Pamela Birtle

Registered manager: Leviena Roets

Inspectors

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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