

Fostering Matters Ltd

The Coach House, Steadings Business Centre, Maisemore Court, Church Road,
Maisemore, Gloucester GL2 8EY

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Matters is a small, privately owned independent fostering agency. This service provides a range of fostering services, including the placement of sibling groups and parent and child arrangements. There are currently 63 children placed, and there are 74 approved foster carers and 44 approved foster carer households.

The manager has been registered since 18 December 2017.

Visit dates: 2 to 3 March 2021

Previous inspection date: 5 March 2018

Previous inspection judgement: 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 identified the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit:

- Leaders and managers failed to ensure that assessments of risk and safer caring plans are comprehensive, individualised and detail the known risks and vulnerabilities of children. The assessments and plans do not provide foster carers with the strategies and guidance they need to safely manage risk and keep the children in their care safe.
- Leaders and managers failed to follow safeguarding procedures. On one occasion, leaders and managers considered placing children with a foster carer whose practice had not been reviewed following a serious allegation.
- Leaders and managers have failed to provide enough challenge and scrutiny of staff and carers to ensure that children consistently receive safe and good-quality care.
- Leaders and managers have not taken prompt action to make use of any learning raised through the evaluation of serious incidents and the monitoring of records.
- Monitoring by leaders and managers is weak. Some supervision records of foster carers and supervising social workers lack detail. In addition, the records contain replications and fail to reflect the seriousness of the discussions that took place.

The care of children

Inspectors found the safer care plans sampled during the assurance visit lacked detail and were not individualised. This means that foster carers do not always have the information and guidance that they need to provide safe, good-quality care for children.

Leaders, managers and supervising social workers do not always demonstrate professional curiosity. The records for one foster carer catalogued concerns about standards of care over many years. However, it was unclear from these records what action the supervising social worker had taken to escalate these concerns.

Inspectors found that some supervision records for foster carers and supervising social workers lacked the critical reflection and scrutiny that would be expected following serious incidents. Some records were generic and repetitive.

The safety of children

Since the last inspection there have been two serious incidents in which children suffered significant harm. In both cases, the inspectors found that leaders and managers had failed to ensure that safer care plans were sufficiently detailed,

personalised and focused on the individual child's needs or the known risks they faced.

Leaders and managers failed to consider the risk of placing children with a foster carer whose practice had not been reviewed following two serious allegations. Furthermore, inspectors found that records for this carer were incomplete and lacked evidence of professional challenge.

On one occasion, leaders and managers had failed to take effective action to protect one child from known risk. As a result, this child witnessed drug and alcohol misuse by the adult son of the foster carer, and was placed at risk from adults visiting the house. Furthermore, leaders and managers failed to take prompt action by undertaking an investigation following this incident and failed to make use of any learning raised through the evaluation and subsequent monitoring of the records.

Leaders and managers

Monitoring by leaders and managers is ineffective and has failed to identify several serious shortfalls. In the most serious cases sampled, inspectors found that leaders and managers were unaware of the poor quality of recording by some supervising social workers, and had not identified patterns and trends in standards of care for one foster carer.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure all plans are ratified by the local authority social worker.. Ongoing recording and chronologies in one case did not capture the actions taken, and one record of supervision was found to be wholly inaccurate. Some records are not signed and dated by the author.

Leaders and managers have not taken prompt action to make use of any learning raised through the evaluation of serious incidents. A professional's standards report was completed following a substantiated allegation made by a child. However, it was unclear what learning had been taken from this piece of work.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision. However, records sampled for the most serious incidents lack guidance for staff. In addition, the seriousness of the incidents are not fully reflected, and practice issues are not recorded as having been discussed or practice challenged.

The staff spoken to during the assurance visit commented positively about the leadership. However, this visit identified serious shortfalls in senior leaders' oversight of practice and the care of some children.

Following this visit, two compliance notices have been issued in respect of the leadership and management of the agency and the protection of children.

Leaders and managers have acknowledged the seriousness of the concerns identified by the inspectors. An action plan to address each concern/compliance notice is in progress and Ofsted will continue to monitor the progress.

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 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.</p> <p>In particular, ensure that a development plan is produced and used to improve and further develop the agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> | 15 April 2021 |
| <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 (a))</p> | 15 April 2021 |

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. (National minimum standards, paragraph 26.5, page 52)
- 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. (National minimum standards, paragraph 25.1, page 50)
- The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards, paragraph 25.2, page 50)

- Management of the service ensures that all of the staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS, and with the service's policies and procedures. (National minimum standards, paragraph 25.3, page 50)
- The registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. (National minimum standards, paragraph 25.8, page 51)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC061740

Registered provider: Fostering Matters Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 7, Malvern View Business Park, Stella Way, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 7DQ

Responsible individual: Michael Castledine

Registered manager: Christopher Morgan

Inspectors

Linda Bond, Social Care Inspector
Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

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