

SWAP Foster Care

Social Work Assessment Partners Limited

43-47 Kings Street, Bedworth, Warwickshire CV12 8NB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately run independent fostering agency provides short and long-term foster placements, and parent and child placements. At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing care for 65 children and two parents. The agency had 34 fostering households.

The manager was registered by Ofsted on 17 June 2020. She is not currently in day-to-day charge of the agency. The deputy manager is currently acting as the manager.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 April 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 30 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Ofsted conducted a monitoring visit of this independent fostering agency on 10 February 2021. This was in response to a serious incident. As a result of this visit,

Ofsted issued a compliance notice under regulation 11. The notice was reviewed as part of this inspection.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children have good experiences with their foster families. Children feel part of their foster families and make good progress physically, emotionally and educationally. However, management oversight of the fostering agency functions has deteriorated since the last full inspection.

Since the monitoring visit, managers have made improvements to the agency's matching process. This means that children are now only placed with foster carers who can meet the child's individual needs.

The agency supports the long-term care of children, including helping foster carers to consider Staying Put or Shared Lives schemes. However, the agency does not always advocate for children's plans for permanence to be progressed in a timely manner. This lack of urgency creates a delay in children's plans being achieved.

Supervising social workers spend time securing children's views. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have worked hard to maintain these links. However, it is not clear how this information has been used to drive service development in response to children's wishes and feelings.

Managers do not ensure that the agency's records hold all the necessary information about children. For example, missing information is not escalated with the right professionals. Consequently, children's care needs are not fully assessed.

The agency's children's guide is out of date. The guide fails to provide information about the agency's statement of purpose or complaints procedure. This leaves children without key information about the agency.

Foster carers are positive about the fostering agency and, in particular, the availability of staff. Consequently, foster carers feel supported.

Prospective foster carers are welcomed by the agency and the assessment process helps to prepare applicants for their role as foster carers. However, there is a lack of clarity within the agency about the assessment process. In particular, there is a lack of information about the different stages of the assessment. As a result, applicants' rights are not clearly explained to them.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Managers have reviewed and updated the children's risk assessments and safe care plans in response to the compliance notice issued after the monitoring visit.

However, these changes do not yet go far enough. These documents still do not contain all necessary information. For example, in the case of a parent and child placement, it is not clear that potential risks presented by parents are fully assessed and understood. These continued omissions place children and their foster carers at risk of potential harm. As a result of these continued shortfalls, Ofsted has issued a further compliance notice.

Managers do not always ensure that social work practice promotes a safeguarding culture. For example, unannounced visits to foster carers' homes do not always take place when children can reasonably be expected to be at home.

Staff are not clear about the agency's safeguarding procedures. For example, staff failed to differentiate between a complaint and a safeguarding concern. This lack of understanding has resulted in delay in concerns being reported to the designated officer.

Managers do not pay sufficient attention to the safe recruitment of staff. Many of the staff have worked at the agency as students and this has led to some complacency about their subsequent recruitment to permanent roles. This leaves children vulnerable to people who may not be suitable to work with them.

Despite these shortfalls, foster carers' diligence of children's care means that children make positive progress in areas of personal safety and reducing risk. For example, children do not regularly go missing from their foster home. In the event that this does occur, foster carers quickly follow clear plans to ensure that children return home safely.

Foster carers are supported to manage incidents of self-harm. This includes linking with external agencies for additional information and advice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Management oversight of the service is poor. Managers were unable to provide inspectors with core data during this inspection. In addition, managers were surprised by information that arose from the inspection. For example, managers were unaware of data regarding placement disruptions. This leaves managers ill prepared to respond to new and emerging themes in the service. The introduction of a new database is anticipated to support improvements in the agency's management oversight.

Managers ensure that staff receive regular supervision. This ensures that staff have regular opportunities to reflect on their practice. However, it is less clear that, when practice deficiencies are raised, managers use supervision effectively to improve performance. This leaves staff without support to aid their development.

Managers have been flexible in their approach to ensuring that they maintain contact with foster carers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included the use of the flexibilities afforded by the coronavirus amendment regulations. However,

these decisions are not documented and managers have not reviewed the arrangements to ensure that these remain relevant and safe.

Managers are unable to demonstrate that staff receive training that is relevant to their level of professional qualification and/or their role. This means that staff are ill equipped to carry out their specialist role.

Managers ensure that foster carers have access to a range of training to support their skills and understanding. However, managers are slow to respond to developing needs and this omission leaves foster carers without the essential knowledge they require.

Managers have systems in place to support their monitoring of schedule six and seven-related matters. However, this has yet to be used to support a review of the quality of care. This further prevents managers from driving service development and improvement.

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—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide,</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and</p> <p>if the children’s guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child’s age and understanding). (Regulation 4 (a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the children’s guide is revised and that the guide meets the requirements as set out in regulation 3.</p>	18 July 2021
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>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))</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that complaints received by the agency are progressed in line with the agency’s policy to ensure transparency in the process for everyone involved.</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that applicants and foster carers receive clear information about processes within the agency relating to assessment, to fostering panel, their rights within the process and the reasons for any panel presentation.</p>	18 July 2021

<p>This particularly refers to the registered person implementing a system to monitor the quality and content of records and ensuring that action is taken to address shortfalls.</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that decision-making regarding the application of the flexibilities of The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 are clearly documented and reviewed regularly.</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> <p>This particularly refers to drafting and maintaining suitable risk assessments.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that parent and child placement plans and risk assessments provide details of risks for both parents and children.</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that post-allegation reviews of foster carers' approval are undertaken without delay.</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that processes for unannounced visits to foster carers' homes are arranged so as to safeguard children.</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring that staff understand and adhere to the agency safeguarding policy regarding the action to be taken in the case of an allegation of abuse or neglect.</p>	18 July 2021
<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. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the fostering service supports foster carers' learning in relation to children's emerging needs.</p>	18 July 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p>allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p>	18 July 2021

<p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that any person working for a fostering service who is not employed by the fostering service, and to whom paragraph (2) does not apply, is appropriately supervised while carrying out their duties. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c) (4))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that full employment checks are in place for all staff employed by the fostering service.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that staff employed by the fostering service have access to training that is relevant to their specialist roles.</p> <p>This refers to ensuring that records of staff supervision record any areas for staff development and the plan in place to support staff to achieve this.</p>	18 July 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 22 (1))</p> <p>This particularly refers to the registered person ensuring there are systems in place to escalate when relevant information has not been received from a child's placing authority.</p>	18 July 2021

<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (2) (3))</p> <p>This particularly refers to providing HMCI with a copy of any written report produced in relation to this regulation.</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that the agency evidences how it takes account of children's views.</p>	<p>18 July 2021</p>
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* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC409413

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Inspectors

Tracey Cogan Greig, Social Care Inspector
Jodie Lewis, Social Care Inspector

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