

# Fostering Limited

Fostering Limited

Suite 8, New Hall Hey Business Centre, New Hall Hey Road, Rawtenstall, Rossendale  
BB4 6HL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency was registered in June 2015. The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term
- respite.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 16 approved fostering households, caring for a total of 33 children.

The registered manager is a director of the agency. She was the original registered manager but then resigned this position for a short time. She was registered again in April 2020.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site inspection activity. Foster carers and children were enabled to take part by video and telephone calls.

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.

We last visited this setting on 6 October 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

### Inspection dates: 14 to 18 June 2021

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 12 August 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** inadequate

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

Following the full inspection in August 2019 a compliance notice was issued under section 22A of the Care Standards Act 2000. The concerns raised in the notice were in relation to regulation 11, the agency's duty to secure welfare. Two monitoring visits and an assurance visit have taken place since August 2019. The agency has been able to demonstrate progress at all of these visits.

## Inspection judgements

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children continue to enjoy trusting and secure relationships with their foster carers. Most children are living with foster families where they will remain on a permanent basis, some with a plan for adoption. Children feel like they are part of the family, which allows them to thrive. The vast majority of children also live with a brother or sister, with over 80% of children living with at least one sibling. The agency also has some large family groups, living with more than one foster family, but enabling frequent contact to take place between the children. This increases children's sense of stability, while also promoting their sense of identity. This is a particular strength of the agency. One child commented in response to a recent Ofsted survey: 'I always get support with my schoolwork and my foster carers always listen to me.'

Children are provided with a child-friendly guide to the agency when they move into their foster family's home. This gives a clear account of the standard of care they can expect to receive. It also includes the contact details of individuals to speak to if they are unhappy or wish to make a complaint. A copy of the guide was uploaded to the agency's website during this inspection, thus ensuring that children can access a copy, even if they mislay their paper copy.

The agency tracks children's progress by using its electronic system to monitor how they are doing. Foster carers complete these reviews periodically and they are then reviewed by the supervising social worker. In the main, children are making good progress with their education. Foster carers and children appear to have coped well with the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency sent questionnaires to all foster carers and children, which illustrated that the majority accepted the situation and tried to make the best of it. Children are now returning to

school and college and can meet with their friends. Foster carers support children to fulfil their potential. This includes discussions about future careers, which helps to motivate children to succeed.

The agency has recently commissioned access to a therapeutic training hub. Staff and foster carers, who are caring for children most in need of this additional support, can access this directly. Thus, they are in receipt of timely advice and support. This means that foster carers are able to respond to children in the most appropriate manner, even if they are waiting for specialist intervention.

The agency has made improvements in monitoring. This includes a system to check that foster carers have the documentation that they need to provide routine care for children, such as care plans, medical consent and delegated authority documents. However, when these documents were explored as part of this inspection, they were not always correct. In some instances, documents had not been signed by all parties to the agreement, making them ineffective, and others had not been fully completed. The manager has yet to develop an auditing system to help identify such issues, or an escalation policy to ensure that such matters are prioritised. This would ensure that foster carers are always clear about their roles and responsibilities.

The agency has not been actively recruiting foster carers since the judgement of inadequate in August 2019. Managers made the decision to pause recruitment while they concentrated efforts on raising standards and practice. There has only been one foster carer assessment in the last 12 months, which was of good quality.

Foster carers have completed training online or via video link, due to the restrictions posed by the pandemic. However, some foster carers have yet to complete training to help them meet the specific needs of the children in their care. A recommendation from the last inspection, relating to foster carers' completion of the training, support and development standards within the required timescales, has now been met. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection provided positive feedback to inspectors regarding their assessment, training and support. Comments included:

- 'The assessment process was brilliant; the social worker was fabulous, and I could not praise him enough. He was friendly and professional.'
- 'The support I get is really good. I am often surprised by their quick responses.'
- 'The training is brilliant, and they are always putting new things on and ask me what I would like to do.'

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Children's behaviour would indicate that they feel safe in their foster families. Serious safeguarding incidents are rare, and children do not put themselves at risk by going missing from home. Children spoken to during this inspection were familiar with supervising social workers and said that they could speak to them if they had any worries.

Supervising social workers ensure that children are seen regularly. In addition, twice-yearly, unannounced visits help ensure that children are receiving high-quality care when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit. Face-to-face visits have continued throughout lockdown with supervising social workers being imaginative in undertaking these, such as meeting in the garden.

The identification and management of risk is effective. Children's known risks are identified prior to placement. Risk assessments are detailed and include strategies for foster carers to manage behaviour safely. They are individualised and updated if new concerns emerge. This ensures that children are responded to in the most effective manner. Similarly, matching documentation evidences that foster carers have the skills to meet the needs of the child concerned.

The agency is clear about its safeguarding responsibilities. It works well with other safeguarding bodies to investigate any allegations, or concerns raised, regarding the quality of care that children receive. The agency shares concerns appropriately and staff reflect well on any incidents, so they can learn from these.

The agency has not recruited any new staff members since the assurance visit in September 2020. However, some new members of the fostering panel have been recruited. Some shortfalls in their recruitment were identified at this inspection. References have not always been taken from the individual's employer when they have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, to confirm why this employment ended. Furthermore, the agency is not consistently requesting confirmation regarding any safeguarding or disciplinary concerns. The record of verification calls to referees is detailed, but fails to explore the above issues, limiting their effectiveness.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. She is a director of the agency. A team manager post has also been introduced since the last full inspection. At the time of the assurance visit, it was evident that the team manager had been instrumental in introducing a number of improvements in practice to the agency, as she is responsible for the majority of day-to-day practice and decision-making. However, the lines of responsibility and accountability between these two posts are not clear. This has become further confused by the registered manager currently holding a small caseload.

There have been significant improvements to monitoring and auditing since the last full inspection. A number of administration systems have been set up to assist with this. However, further investigation by managers into some of the documents held in the agency's system would assist in relation to the quality of this information, as highlighted above. A quality assurance officer is employed to audit foster carers' and children's records. This is helping to identify gaps, allowing the agency to rectify these.

The central list of fostering panel members brings a range of experience, both professional and personal, to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency and is suitably qualified and experienced. The panel has met virtually since the onset of the pandemic and continues to do so currently. Panel minutes demonstrate a suitable degree of scrutiny and challenge. On one occasion, the panel identified that a section of a report being presented to it had not been completed. The supervising social worker was able to present the missing information promptly. This issue was not identified by the pre-panel quality assurance process. The role of quality assurance prior to panel is one role that is not currently defined between managers.

The agency decision is made promptly, with the decision-maker clearly listing his own reasons for reaching his decision. However, this has sometimes been made prematurely. When a foster carer's registration or change to the terms of approval are being considered, a qualifying determination has not been made, nor has the agreement of the foster carers been sought in writing, prior to the agency decision. This potentially denies the carers the opportunity for appeal.

Supervising social workers receive regular reflective supervision and feel well supported. The team manager has successfully driven forward improvements in practice. However, case work decision-making is not currently recorded on the foster carers' records, which would help provide a clearer audit trail.

The standard of foster carers' supervision is very good, with detailed recording that is shared with the foster carer. Similarly, foster carers' annual reviews are thorough, ensuring that children receive high-quality care.

The professional development of staff has not been prioritised since the last inspection. While all staff, as well as panel members, are expected to complete the same core training modules as foster carers, there have been limited opportunities for staff to attend more targeted training courses. Furthermore, the registered manager is not currently receiving any professional supervision, which would provide an opportunity for her to reflect and develop her practice.

The agency has not offered parent and child placements since August 2019, as the management of these largely contributed to their previous inspection judgement. The agency has not actively recruited and in real terms is smaller than it was at that time. However, managers and staff are committed to improvement and acknowledge that a period of consolidation was required, prior to further expansion. The agency has taken action to meet the one requirement and three recommendations resulting from the last assurance visit.

## 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 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>In particular, specific training for foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their care.</p>	31 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.</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. (Regulation 20 (1)(a) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	31 July 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and</p> <p>are enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 21 (4)(a)(b))</p>	31 July 2021

The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.

31 July 2021

If, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, the fostering service provider are no longer satisfied that the foster parent or the foster parent's household continue to be suitable, or that the terms of the approval are appropriate, they must (subject to paragraph (8))—

give written notice to the foster parent that they propose to terminate, or (as the case may be) revise the terms of, the foster parent's approval (a "qualifying determination"), together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the fostering panel, and

in any case where the fostering service provider propose only to revise the terms of the foster parent's approval—

provide a statement setting out whether the fostering service provider considers that the foster parent or members of the foster parent's household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs as a result of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met, and

request the foster parent's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms,

advise the foster parent that, within 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination, the foster parent may—

submit any written representations that the foster parent wishes to make to the fostering service provider, or

apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination.  
(Regulation 28 (1) (7)(a)(aa)(i)(ii)(b)(i)(ii))

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who

assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams. (National minimum standards 13.7)

- The registered person should regularly monitor 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 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined. (National minimum standards 25.4)
- The registered person should ensure that 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. This refers to casework discussions and decisions being recorded on the individual case record. (National minimum standards 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. (National minimum standards 31.2)

## **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:** SC488290

**Registered provider:** Fostering Limited

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## **Inspectors**

Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector  
Suzanne Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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