

Fusion Fostering South Central

Fusion Fostering Limited

Fusion Fostering Ltd, FF4, Cams Hall, Fareham, Hampshire PO16 8AB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fusion Fostering has been operating since 2011. The growth of the agency has led to the creation of five regional offices. The South Central office of Fusion Fostering was separately registered in June 2016. The agency provides a wide range of foster homes. The agency's statement of purpose states that this includes short- and long-term, respite and emergency foster care.

At the time of this inspection, the agency has 40 fostering households who are caring for 28 children.

The current manager has been registered with Ofsted since March 2016.

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.

Inspection dates: 28 June to 1 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/06/2019	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are at the heart of this agency. The managers, the staff and the carers are passionate about helping the children to achieve and for them to follow their dreams.

The vast majority of the children make excellent progress and are well supported by the agency and the carers. Overall, the carers offer nurturing, high-quality care and provide children with consistency, structure and routine. As a result, the children build trusted and secure relationships with their carers, who know and understand them well.

Carers encourage the children to take part in fun and new experiences. Children take part in a variety of activities suited to their interests and hobbies. As a result, the children increase their self-confidence and extend their social networks.

Many of the carers' relationships with the children continue into adulthood through 'staying put' arrangements and/or ongoing emotional and practical support. New carers at the start of their fostering journey are encouraged to think beyond age-limited relationships. This helps the children develop a positive self-view and increases their ability to form and sustain attachments into their early adult life.

The registered manager's commitment to maintaining a 'family feel' to the agency permeates through to the fostering families and the children. Carers were unanimous in their praise of the support that they receive from their supervising social workers and the agency. Manageable caseloads mean that the staff have time to offer a high level of support to the carers and the children. Consequently, the majority of children feel safe, cared for and very much part of their fostering family.

During the most restrictive periods of COVID-19, some children continued to attend school. However, many carers home-schooled the children. Carers said that hands-on practical help and regular contact from staff were especially appreciated during this period. The strong sense of belonging carers feel in the agency empowers them to seek guidance and advice to ensure that the children receive the right help and care to meet their needs.

Carers support the children to maintain and develop their relationships with their families and friends when it is safe to do so. Supervising social workers and carers advocate on the children's behalf and ensure that their needs remain central to these arrangements.

Most children enjoy warm relationships in their fostering family. However, the standard of care provided by one fostering family has harmed a child's experience. Practice issues were addressed through supervision, training and the annual review process but not escalated to a practice of concern investigation. The lack of a formal

investigation when emerging practice concerns arise inhibits new learning and may mean that practice continues below the expected standards of care.

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

The staff and the carers have good relationships with other professionals who work together effectively for the benefit of the children. Managers and supervising social workers know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of children. Consequently, there is good multi-agency partnership working to protect the children.

Carers follow children's missing from home procedures, and often go over and beyond in their attempts to ensure the children's safe return. Staff advocate on the children's behalf to obtain a return home interview from their placing authority. However, this is not always successful. This represents a missed opportunity to establish the reasons for a child going missing, and reduce the potential for further episodes occurring.

Children benefit from regular contact with their carers' supervising social workers. They visit the carers at least once a month and spend time developing a good rapport with each child. These visits, along with unannounced visits, ensure that the children have regular opportunities to speak to known professionals and share any worries or concerns.

Matching decisions are variable in quality and do not consistently explore all the needs, risks and identified gaps, nor how these should be addressed. Information about the children's identity and cultural heritage in some matching plans is limited. This means that the carers are not fully equipped to promote the children's identity and cultural needs from the outset.

On occasion, staff have failed to get full and relevant information from the local authority to inform matching. For example, not obtaining a copy of a child's protection plan before she joined her fostering family. This meant that this information was not used to develop her risk assessments and safe care plan.

Staff complete basic agency risk assessments, placement plans and safer care plans to support carers in meeting the needs of children in their care. However, these do not always sufficiently detail all relevant practical information, strategies and information to enable carers to respond to children's needs and to manage risk. For example, risks relating to online safety and self-harm.

Strategies in risk management plans to minimise risks are often generic. They do not always contain the views of the children and are not routinely updated after significant incidents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Managers are very child-focused, and this translates throughout the entire agency. Carers feel part of a team working to ensure the best interests of the children. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year, morale is high.

The registered manager has developed good monitoring and audit systems to ensure effective oversight of practice, which helps him to identify patterns and trends. As a result, he has a good understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses and can address any issues as they arise. The registered manager demonstrates enthusiasm and sustained progress to continue to develop the service in the best interests of the children using it.

Recruitment procedures for staff adhere to safer recruitment principles, ensuring that only appropriately vetted staff are employed to work with children. The fostering panel and agency decision maker fulfil their quality-assurance function through providing insightful and helpful feedback to the agency on the quality of assessments. This is supporting the agency to improve.

Leaders and managers ensure carers are provided with opportunities to develop their practice through a broad range of training resources. There has been a high take-up of online training by carers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff purchase bespoke online training when required by a carer or when a gap in their knowledge is identified.

A recent example demonstrated that staff and managers are responsive in ensuring the carers have the right skills and knowledge. A carer described requesting LGBTQ+ training and that this was purchased immediately for her, enabling her to complete the training before the child returned home from school. This increased her confidence to have an open and supportive conversations with the child about the carer's use of pronouns. This action sends a strong message to children of acceptance, and that the carers want to get it right for them.

The registered manager receives support and supervision that helps him fulfil his role to provide a high-quality service for the children and the carers. However, this could be strengthened to ensure that there is a specific focus on safeguarding matters. Similarly, carers' supervision records are not consistent in their focus of safeguarding matters, and in how they are supported to manage risk.

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 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, and</p> <p>before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's—</p> <p>wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and</p> <p>religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11 (a)(b)(i)(ii))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to the registered manager ensuring that standards of care investigations are initiated when emerging themes of practice concerns and issues relating to the foster carers become apparent.</p> <p>This is with specific reference to the registered manager ensuring, that risk assessments and risk management plan are up to date and provide sufficient guidance and advice on how to keep children safe.</p> <p>In addition, the registered manager must ensure that there are matching plans for all children. These should consider the skills and experience of the carers in meeting the specific needs of the child, also include information about children's identity and cultural heritage and how this will be promoted.</p>	20 August 2021

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that each approved foster carer supervision meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account how risks are being managed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.8)
- The registered provider should ensure that the fostering service supports their foster carers provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future. In addition, ensure that the foster care supervision records are of consistent quality. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.1)
- The registered person should ensure suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered manager, specifically, that there is a sufficient focus on safeguarding. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 24.3)

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: 1212899

Registered provider: Fusion Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Old Mill, Maltravers House, Petters Way, Yeovil,
Somerset BA20 1SH

Responsible individual: David Tucker

Registered manager: Benjamin Coward

Inspectors

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector
Stephen Collett, Social Care Inspector

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