

Fostering Together

Fostering Together Ltd

Unit 7 Haguelands Farm, Burmarsh Road, Burmarsh, Kent TN29 0JR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency registered with Ofsted in August 2020.

The agency offers short- and long-term fostering for children, including children with disabilities and complex life-limiting medical needs.

There are currently six fostering households with 10 children placed.

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: 12 to 16 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

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

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

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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

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

Children live with committed foster carers who have mainly transferred from another agency. Most children have been with the same carers on a long-term basis. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of individual placement plans for children. Foster carers do not have all relevant guidance to help care for children. This means that children's needs, wishes and interests are not clearly understood.

The complex health needs of some children are not understood by the staff team. As a result, placement plans do not always meet children's individual needs. Staff lack professional curiosity about children's experiences of their care. This is important given the complex health needs of a significant number of children. An important change in the health plan for one child and their high level of medical needs were not fully understood by the staff team. However, the plan was reviewed effectively during the inspection.

Due to the absence of necessary equipment to enable freedom of movement around the foster carer's home, one child is having to find alternative ways to access stairs. There has been no review of the alternative strategies, which impacts on the child's independence. This has been identified as part of the agency improvement plan following this inspection.

Children's communication needs are not fully understood by supervising social workers. This is due to a lack of knowledge and skills to communicate effectively with children who use alternative communication methods. Children are not routinely seen on their own, either virtually or in person when this has been possible. This reflects staff not feeling confident to meaningfully engage with children. Training is being arranged to enable staff to develop the necessary knowledge and skills.

Foster carers support children well to communicate their wishes. For example, they help children to engage in their learning and choose activities to take part in. This is important given the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Agency staff have supported children with enjoyable activities to do at home during the pandemic. Children's achievements and important times in their lives are celebrated by the team. This is appreciated by carers and shows children that they are valued.

Social workers meet regularly with foster carers for individual supervision. This provides a dedicated space for foster carers to reflect on their role. Support for carers to access the agency's online recording system has included the agency providing information technology equipment. This has helped foster carers to provide up-to-date information about children's progress. This is important in the context of children's health needs. Foster carers say that they have felt well supported by the staff team during the pandemic.

Foster carers speak up for children. They help children to spend time with family where this is possible. Professionals shared positive feedback about the support and care provided to children. Children's guides do not include information about independent advocacy and how to access this. This is significant given children's individual communication needs.

The quality of assessment of prospective foster carers is good. This enables panel members to make appropriate recommendations on their suitability. The experienced panel chairperson provides effective challenge where needed. There is a good level of scrutiny and oversight by the agency decision-maker. They bring significant experience to the role and make a positive contribution to the quality of practice.

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

Risk management plans for children vary in quality. There is inconsistency in the information held in each child's plan. This includes relevant information about the complex medical needs of one child, which is needed to ensure safe care. In one case, the information held did not reflect the child's placement plan. The planned review of this child's risk assessment, during the inspection, ensured that appropriate guidance is now in place for foster carers and the staff team.

The staff team and the registered manager do not routinely sign the risk management plans. This results in a lack of continuing oversight of this important safeguarding tool. Relevant information relating to the risk assessment is not always easily accessible. This was addressed through inspection activity with an action plan in place to ensure effective oversight of identified risks for children.

The individual safe care plans for children are not routinely reviewed by the registered manager. This is necessary to ensure that effective oversight of care is provided to meet children's individual needs. The change in the approach to care to meet the specific medical needs for one child was not adequately assessed. The agency did not have sufficient oversight of the decision-making in relation to this. As a result, the significant impact of these changes on the child's experiences were not understood.

There is appropriate oversight of the administering of medication to children. Through this, the team ensures that children's health needs are appropriately addressed. This is important due to the individual medical needs of children. Training in relation to specific approaches to care for individual children is not consistently undertaken. This has been identified within the action plan devised during this inspection.

Safer recruitment practice is followed in respect of recruitment of foster carers and staff. This helps to ensure that only suitable people provide care for children.

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

The registered manager does not have sufficient understanding of practice issues in respect of the needs of all the children. This is concerning due to the individual level of vulnerability for each child placed with the agency. However, the registered manager and responsible individual bring significant professional experience to their respective roles. During the inspection, they developed an action plan together, to begin to address the practice issues identified.

The fostering services manager supports the registered manager well in their role. They also bring significant experience in social work practice which they apply in leading supervising social workers. The support from the agency management team is appreciated by staff. However, neither the registered manager nor the fostering services manager is employed by the agency on a permanent basis. This makes it difficult to develop the service based on the identified improvements needed.

The Secure Base Model approach to care is not fully rooted in practice across the agency. This is not in line with the agency's statement of purpose. Additional training for staff is being arranged to help to further embed this. However, there are no permanent supervising social workers employed by the agency. This means that it is difficult to provide the continuity of care which underpins the agency's approach.

Staff receive regular supervision, which helps them to reflect on their role. Supervision for the registered manager is provided by the agency decision-maker. Although of good quality, this does not provide enough neutrality, due to the potential conflict of the different roles and responsibilities within the agency. The registered manager and responsible individual have plans to address this.

There is a clear plan for the transition to a newly employed prospective registered manager. This was identified before the inspection. The registered manager and responsible individual have appropriately thought through what is needed to provide a smooth transition. The responsible individual significantly contributes to the work of the agency on a day-to-day basis. Foster carers particularly appreciated their support and that of the senior leadership team during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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>	31 August 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, 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>	31 August 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular the fostering service provider must ensure that each child—</p> <p>is provided with such individual support, aids and equipment</p>	31 August 2021

<p>which the child may require as a result of any particular health needs or disability the child may have, and</p> <p>is provided with guidance, support and advice on health, personal care and health promotion issues appropriate to the child's needs and wishes. (Regulation 15 (1)(2)(c)(d))</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b))</p>	31 August 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 to time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 21 (4)(a)(b))</p>	31 August 2021

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: 2574877

Registered provider: Fostering Together Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 7 Haguelands Farm, Burmarsh Road,
Burmarsh, Kent TN29 0JR

Responsible individual: Matthew Foulkes

Registered manager: Patricia McMullan

Telephone number: 01233 515031

Inspectors

Maria Lonergan, Social Care Inspector
Suzy Lemmy, Social Care Inspector

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