

Pilgrims Corner Fostering Ltd

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185 Sea Street, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8JY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency offers short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child placements. It currently has 21 fostering households and 30 children living with foster carers.

There has been no registered manager in post since 23 November 2020.

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: 7 to 11 June 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 29 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Serious regulatory shortfalls at every level of agency practice puts children at risk of harm. Foster carers have been recruited without proper scrutiny of their suitability for the role and the high turnover of staff means that there are no established relationships between them and the agency's supervising social workers. Consequently, foster carers receive neither support nor challenge in response to the standards of care that they provide to children.

There are no permanent social workers employed by the agency and no manager in post. The volume and pace of numerous staffing changes over recent months has destabilised the agency. Foster carers report that support arrangements are inconsistent and irregular. They do not feel that they have effective relationships with their supervising social workers. This leaves some foster carers without the necessary support and direction to provide the care that children need. In one example, this lack of support has resulted in further disruption for a child, whose foster carers cite this reason for ending the placement.

Children's views and experiences of care are not well understood by the agency. In some cases, these are not sought. In other cases, their views are not given weight and their experiences of care are not fully explored or understood by the agency. For example, a child made reference to the foster home being 'loud and sometimes stressful'. This was not explored by the supervising social worker or the fostering panel. In another example, it was not clear if a child had made comments independently or with the help of foster carers. This means that agency staff cannot be reassured that children have a positive experience of care and children do not have an effective way of sharing their concerns with agency staff.

In response to a previous requirement about improving the way it responds to complaints, the agency has made some provision for complaints to be investigated independently. However, there are a number of concerns raised by children in placement about their care that have not been addressed.

The agency is not equipped to meet the needs of children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There is little diversity in respect of race, religion or culture within the available agency foster carers. There are no plans in place to improve this situation. In one instance, a child of dual racial heritage was placed with a White British family. Beyond basic hair and skin care, there was a lack of understanding as to how this family would meet this child's needs in relation to helping the child to develop their sense of identity with regard to their heritage.

Some documents reviewed by inspectors demonstrated poor matching practice which failed to explore the needs of children against the skills, experience and support needs of the intended foster carers. In one example, the forms used to record the matching process contained cut and pasted identical sentences and

paragraphs to describe how different families could meet the needs of a child. Consequently, the inspectors were not convinced that the rationale for choosing any of these foster carers was based on an honest and true analysis of their ability to be considered as a suitable match. In another example, one foster carer reported that matching had 'become rushed' and felt that a placement ended in an unplanned way as a result of this.

Local authority placing social workers consistently describe some good care and good outcomes for children but are unanimous in their view that the agency is not providing effective support to children and families and is not communicating effectively with them. In one instance, a situation in a family that potentially presented a significant risk to children was not communicated to the placing authority prior to it placing a child. Some placing social workers have increased their support to the families because they feel that the agency is not providing support. It is apparent that, where children do make good progress and receive good care, this is in spite of, rather than because of, the support that they get from the agency.

Some children have made positive progress in their engagement and achievements in education. However, in some instances, this was not the case. In one example, a child was noted to be spending most of their time alone in their room playing computer games. The foster carers were not supported or challenged by the agency to help this child to develop more constructive and healthy routines.

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

The quality of support provided by supervising social workers is poor. Safeguarding concerns are not fully explored or investigated. Standards of care issues are not being addressed and the agency does not currently have the capacity to deliver effective support and supervision to foster carers, or to follow up on safeguarding concerns.

Agency supervising social worker visits do not take place with the agreed frequency. Supervising social workers do not maintain effective oversight of the foster carers' practice in key areas such as completing training, administration of medications, quality of daily records or safe care arrangements. There are few specified actions agreed at supervisions and key aspects of care are not routinely discussed. Inspectors noted examples of daily logs completed by foster carers that used language that is not compatible with good child-centred care. These records were not consistently challenged or addressed and the potential lack of insight into children's needs that may underpin this language was not explored.

Inspectors found examples where care practice indicated that some foster carers lack insight into the impact of past trauma on children's behaviour. In one example, a carer carried a 6-year-old boy to the car and threatened to take him to the police station. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of his presenting behaviours and does not consider the emotional impact of their actions on this young child. Recent face-to-face training for carers in relation to trauma-informed care was poorly attended.

The fostering panel is ineffective in its function to ensure that newly approved foster carers are suitable or that there is effective scrutiny of foster carers' ongoing suitability for the role. The quality of assessments for prospective foster carers is poor and, in some cases, assessments completely fail to explore and evaluate information that could impact on a prospective foster carer's ability to provide safe care.

Annual review reports do not always evidence that all relevant information is fully considered and evaluated to inform decisions about foster carers' suitability to foster. In some cases, standards of care issues are not properly considered and the views of children are absent or not used to inform the assessment of the care being provided.

Agency forms used to assess risk, safe care and children's health needs do not evidence good social work practice in the assessment of key areas of children's need and vulnerability. They do not identify effective strategies to meet needs or mitigate risk. Assessments are not updated in response to information that indicates that children may be at increased risk of harm. This is poor practice in relation to recording but in addition, inspectors also found a number of examples where, in practice, no action was taken to investigate or respond to situations where children were at potential risk of harm.

There are significant gaps in foster carer mandatory training in key areas of safeguarding practice. Only 13 out of 47 carers had completed mandatory online safety training. In one instance, when a child was known to be communicating with an unknown adult online, no action was taken to explore the associated risks and no action was taken to safeguard this child. In another example, a foster family caring for two children diagnosed with epilepsy had no training in how to care for them safely. There was no oversight from the agency as to how effective the administration of medication was for these children. This lack of training and oversight, and absence of any action to address areas of vulnerability, places children at risk of significant harm.

Recruitment practice is unsafe. There are significant gaps in relation to suitability checks for agency staff and panel members. The agency systems in place to ensure that agency staff have been vetted to ensure that they are of suitable character and that they have a track record of competence for the role are not effective. These checks are delegated to an employment agency and no evidence was available to confirm that these checks had taken place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

There is currently no effective leadership and management of the agency. In recent months, the registered manager has left and the acting manager also recently left. The responsible individual is the only senior staff member in the agency. She is not a qualified social worker and is therefore not qualified to have day-to-day oversight of social work or safeguarding practice.

There are no systems in place for effective management oversight of safeguarding concerns and the agency does not have the resources to act on information that indicates potential safeguarding or standards of care concerns. This places children at risk of harm.

Requirements raised at the last inspection in relation to foster carer training, complaints procedures and the effectiveness of the panel; have not been met. The action plan to address concerns identified in an independent safeguarding audit commissioned by the agency in November 2020 has not been addressed. This audit identified a number of areas of concern, including potentially serious standards of care issues that were known as far back as July 2020. At this inspection, these concerns had still not been investigated or addressed.

The fostering panel does not provide an adequate level of independent scrutiny of the quality of foster carers or the care that children receive. The panel chair has not attended the panel since February 2021. There is no coherent explanation for this. The named panel chair and the responsible individual gave conflicting accounts as to why the panel chair is not attending panel or if they will be attending in the future.

In recent panel meetings, three panel members were described as 'independent social workers'. These individuals were in fact agency social workers. On one occasion, they were being asked to evaluate an assessment that was undertaken by their manager. This is a conflict of interest and undermines the key function of the panel to provide independent scrutiny in order to make recommendations about the suitability or fitness of foster carers to provide safe care for vulnerable children.

Agency staff do not receive effective supervision from a manager or suitable person. This means that they do not have any protected time to reflect on their practice, to seek guidance and support or to address their learning and development needs.

The agency does not consistently work effectively in partnership with placing authorities. One placing authority described a situation that arose when it placed a child. The social worker reported that the agency failed to share information about the placement that had the potential to make this placement unsafe for this child. Inspectors noted that, on one occasion, the agency failed to carry out actions agreed with the designated officer, to conduct an internal investigation in response to concerns raised by a child.

The working relationships within the agency were described as toxic by a number of agency-based and external professionals. It is particularly worrying that the previous leadership and management of the agency lacked oversight of social work practice and that the current leadership does not have a good sense of how children are experiencing care. The agency does not demonstrate that it has the capacity to improve practice in key areas of safeguarding practice.

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 prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The written policy must include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with that foster parent.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response,</p> <p>consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(b) (2) (3)(d)(e))</p>	31 July 2021
<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 July 2021
The registered provider and the registered manager must,	31 July 2021

<p>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 the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>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>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p> <p>no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable, and</p> <p>restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13 (1) (2)(b)(c))</p>	31 July 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 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</p>	31 July 2021

<p>to do so.</p> <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. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c))</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>	31 July 2021
<p>The registered provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency.</p> <p>Where the registered provider is—</p> <p>an organisation, it must not appoint the person who is the responsible individual as the manager,</p> <p>a partnership, it must not appoint any of the partners as the manager.</p> <p>The registered provider must notify the Chief Inspector without delay of—</p> <p>the name of any person appointed in accordance with this regulation, and</p> <p>the date on which the appointment is to take effect. (Regulation 6 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b))</p>	31 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>31 July 2021</p>
<p>The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>children are enabled to make a complaint or representation. (Regulation 18 (4) (5)(a))</p>	<p>31 July 2021</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable.</p> <p>The fostering panel must also—</p> <p>advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness,</p> <p>oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and</p> <p>give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it.</p> <p>In this regulation “recommend” means recommend to the fostering service provider. (Regulation 25 (3) (4)a)(b)(c) (5))</p>	<p>31 July 2021</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.</p> <p>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider</p>	<p>31 July 2021</p>

must—

make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and

seek and take into account the views of—

the foster parent,

any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child's age and understanding), and

any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.

At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—

the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and

the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate.

The fostering service provider must on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration.

If the fostering service provider decide, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, that the foster parent and the foster parent's household continue to be suitable and that the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate, they must give written notice to the foster parent of their decision.

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

<p>foster parent's approval (a "qualifying determination"), together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the fostering panel, and advise the foster parent that, within 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination, the foster parent may—</p> <p>submit any written representations that the foster parent wishes to make to the fostering service provider, or</p> <p>apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination. (Regulation 28 (1) (2) (3)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii) (4)(a)(b) (5) (6) (7)(a)(b)(i)(ii))</p>	
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>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)(a)(b)(2)(3))</p>	<p>31 July 2021</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents,</p> <p>promote the regular school attendance and participation in school activities of children of compulsory school age placed with foster parents, and</p> <p>provide foster parents with such information and assistance, including equipment, as may be necessary to meet the</p>	<p>31 July 2021</p>

educational needs of children placed with them.

The fostering service provider must ensure that any education they provide for any child placed with a foster parent who is of compulsory school age, but who is not attending school, is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs the child may have.

The fostering service provider must ensure that foster parents promote the leisure interests of children placed with them.

Where any child placed with a foster parent is above compulsory school age, the fostering service provider must assist with the making of, and give effect to, the arrangements made for the child's education, training and employment. (Regulation 16 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(3)(4)(5))

Recommendations

- Fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.6)
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short-break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.8)
- Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.6)

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: SC376060

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Registered provider address: 185 Sea Street, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8JY

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Inspectors

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