

# Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy Limited

Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 2SJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Fitzgerald Fostering and Consultancy Limited is owned and managed by the responsible individual and the registered manager and operates from a serviced office complex in Bracknell.

The agency provides a range of foster placements on an emergency, short-break, short-term or longer-term basis, for children from 0 to 18 years old. At the time of this inspection 20 fostering households were providing care for 22 children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 5 December 2008.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 25 to 28 October 2021

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of last inspection:** 19 February 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for children is embedded in this agency's practice. The leaders and managers inspire a culture of high aspirations and expectations for all their staff and foster carers to transform and improve the lives of children. As a result, children are thriving in the high number of long-term and staying put arrangements that are supported by the agency. This increases the children's sense of permanence and ability to form and sustain positive attachments.

Professional practice is exceptional. The tenacity of the social work team in advocating on behalf of children exceeds professional expectations. The supervising social workers and managers know each child and foster carer individually. One foster carer said, 'They are good with the children and the children know them all too. They care about us as well as the children and they make you feel like a part of the team.'

The agency's response to supporting children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic was swift and reassuring. Regular updates were sent to foster carers by managers. Carers said that they were one of the first agencies in the area to get their vaccines. Where possible, face-to-face visits continued. One foster carer who had difficulty working administratively from home was offered office space by the provider.

Children make exceptional progress, considering their starting points. Supportive foster carers believe in children's ambitions and help them to realise their potential. One young person in staying put arrangements said, 'My carer has been life changing, she treats me like her actual child. I would not be here without her and she has helped me secure my dream job.'

Foster carers' diaries and the staff's records use caring and appropriate language. Managers and the staff recognise that children may have access to their records, now and in the future. The purposeful avoidance of potentially stigmatising language and jargon in children's records is another example of the consideration given and the value that the agency places on the children.

Foster carers actively encourage the children to lead full and active lives. Children have access to a broad range of activities, hobbies and opportunities to try new experiences. These experiences provide the children with personal growth opportunities as well as enjoyment.

Foster carers and children have access to specialist support through the organisation's therapeutic lead person. Research-informed practice is evident in the care of the children. The delivery of regular practice development support groups and bespoke training is promoted by the therapeutic lead and is exceptional. This

creates greater potential for placement stability and prioritises the children's emotional well-being.

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

Staff prioritise safeguarding in their daily practice. Managers and the supervising social workers know and follow procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of children. Children feel safe in their placements and can identify who they would speak to if they had concerns.

In one case, however, a full standards of care investigation should have been undertaken following a child making an allegation. In addition, this case was not referred to the panel for review. This was an isolated incident and not reflective of the agency's usual practice.

Overall, the agency's fostering panel fulfils its quality-assurance function through providing insightful and helpful feedback to the agency about the quality of assessments. There were, however, minor discrepancies found in two assessments (Form F's) sampled.

A comprehensive safeguarding training programme is available and attended by foster carers. Consequently, from a safeguarding perspective, foster carers know what to do and when in terms of their safeguarding responsibilities. However, there have been one or two occasions when gaps in other elements of foster carers' training were not identified at the start of a child coming to live with their foster carers. For example, the value of receiving specific training in respect of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child was not identified at the earliest possible stage for the foster carers.

There is good practice in terms of assessing risks. Safe care plans demonstrate how children are being supported to understand how they can keep themselves safe online and in the community. All children have their own individual risk assessments. One child's risk assessment missed an opportunity to cover a specific area identified.

Foster carers benefit from supportive relationships with their supervising social workers and the managers. Help and advice is readily available for the foster carers when they need it. The foster carers appreciate and value the support provided by the agency, which provides regular support groups, alongside smaller support groups for primary and secondary foster carers. This ensures that the foster carers receive effective support and develop confidence in themselves when dealing with difficult situations.

Foster carers' supervision meetings have a clear purpose. Supervising social workers support and challenge foster carers, ensuring that they are meeting the children's needs and have the resources to do so. Children enjoy regular time with their foster carers' supervising social workers. This builds a good rapport between them. These visits, along with unannounced visits, ensure that the children have regular

opportunities to speak to known professionals and can share any worries or concerns.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. When they do, there is good liaison with the police and safeguarding agencies. There have been no incidents where foster carers have had to resort to using physical intervention. Foster carers have good behaviour management strategies in place. Consequently, the children feel safe, loved and well cared for.

Leaders recruit practitioners from specialised safeguarding backgrounds to enhance practice and the support to fostering households. As a result, foster carers are supported to safely meet the needs of children in their care.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The registered manager and the responsible individual own and manage the agency. They are visible, passionate and accessible leaders with a focus on ensuring children receive the best possible care. Managers provide exceptional support to staff, who demonstrate strong loyalty to the organisation. Staff turnover is minimal, and this is indicative of a well-supported, highly motivated workforce. The agency is well resourced in terms of expertise, experience and sufficiency in terms of supporting foster carers and children.

The ethos of the leaders and managers is that their agency offers an individualised and bespoke service to foster carers and children. This is a real strength of the provider, and one that is appreciated by the children, foster carers and staff team.

Leaders and managers ensure effective care planning takes place. The matching process and children moving into their foster home procedure is strong. Staff are tenacious when it comes to ensuring other professionals take action to ensure children's needs are met. For example, delays by placing authorities have been escalated as concerns by agency managers.

The agency has an excellent record in terms of the longevity of foster placements. The majority of children feel stable and secure in their foster homes. Managers can demonstrate the progress that children make. One child has progressed across a variety of areas while with his foster carers, including in education, socialisation and emotional vocabulary.

The agency has recently completed its children's consultation, which is an outstanding piece of work. The independent social worker was able to interview 23 children, face to face, for at least one to two hours each, to obtain their individual views. Children's needs are prioritised to an exceptional level by this agency.

Managers go above and beyond to holistically support children in their foster placements. The agency has resourced additional support for foster families in need. An example of this is the agency providing therapeutic input for household family members and carers when there have been difficulties in securing this elsewhere.

Foster carer supervision is regular and of a good standard. Potential safeguarding concerns are always explored. Foster carers' own well-being and development needs are carefully considered. Sufficient professional challenge is made.

The professional supervision of social workers by the registered manager is always consistent and regular. The supervisions are reflective of practice and areas for development. The appraisal of one supervising social worker was out of timescales, primarily due to the impact of COVID-19.

## **What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.6)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that, as soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. Specifically, ensure the panel has sufficient oversight of safeguarding concerns resulting from foster carers' practice. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.8)

### **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:** SC383749

**Registered provider:** Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy Limited

**Registered provider address:** Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 2SJ

**Responsible individual:** James Townend

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## **Inspectors**

Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

Stephen Collett, Social Care Inspector

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