

Lotus Foster Care Ltd

Lotus Foster Care Ltd

Station Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 2RD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency is based in Croydon, south London. The service aims to provide short-term care, bridging placements, long-term care, respite care, emergency care and sibling placements. The service also provides parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency had 12 approved fostering households with seven children in placement. This is the fostering service's first inspection following its registration with Ofsted in May 2020. The manager was registered at the same time.

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: 1 to 5 November 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: 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: good

The fostering agency provides good-quality care. Outcomes for children are positive. They develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. A child told the inspector: 'Everything here is fine. The family are like my real family. I feel at home.'

Children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs. The fostering agency pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity. For example, key information for children is translated into their primary language, and children are encouraged to practice their chosen faith if they wish to. Foster carers use visual aids, such as storyboards, with some children who have learning difficulties. This is to ensure that they understand the information being relayed.

Children said that they feel listened to. They are aware of how to make complaints. However, children rarely make complaints about the service. When complaints are made, managers take what children say seriously and offer a prompt and sensitive response.

Children benefit from the fostering service's careful placement planning. Introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are sensitively coordinated. Children receive useful information about the service and a welcome pack. This helps to settle children from the outset, and enhances placement success. Managers must ensure that the agency's matching document highlights any unmet needs and how these are to be met.

Children live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of the children's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Children have good access to primary healthcare services and receive advice and support from specialist services as required. This is particularly the case for children who have mental health support needs.

Children benefit from the fostering agency's protocols and procedures regarding the prevention of COVID-19. This preventive work has helped to keep children and foster carers safe throughout the pandemic.

Children's learning outcomes are good. Children attend school or college regularly and make good progress from their original starting points. Foster carers are strong advocates for the children's educational success, and they are very much involved in promoting this ethos. Children celebrate their academic and more general achievements. This acts as further motivation for children to do well.

The preparation of older children for their transition to adulthood is good. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the staff, who help to prepare them to manage their lives more independently. As children move on from their

placements, foster carers prepare information and photobooks which capture children's experiences with them.

Children have contact with their siblings, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering service manages arrangements for contact carefully. Staff ensure that there is a consistent focus on the impact of contact, and that arrangements are always in the best interest of children.

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

Staff work hard to protect children from neglect, harm, abuse and bullying. The staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children are central to the agency's work. The training and supervision of staff and foster carers have a strong focus on child protection.

The agency ensures that foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children. The agency has detailed child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. This helps to keep children safe. However, managers are yet to develop and implement adult protection policies, in order to help safeguard adults in parent and child placements.

The assessment and preparation of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection. This supports the safe care of children. Foster families have safe care policies in place. These outline how fostering households will keep children safe. However, managers do not consistently ensure that safe care policies address the specific needs of individual children. This is to offer foster carers guidance on managing particular risk factors for each child they care for.

Placement plans address children's changing needs and promote strategies that help to reduce risk-taking behaviour. Staff complete comprehensive risk assessments. These help to reduce known and anticipated risks. However, some risk assessments are not kept updated to highlight newly identified risks.

There have been incidents of children going missing and suspicions of children's involvement in child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation. Some children are known to self-harm. In each case, the agency has acted appropriately and effectively to help keep children safe.

Managers ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and foster carers. In one case, this included a police check from another country where the foster carers had previously lived. This approach to recruitment allows the agency to confirm that foster carers are suitable to care for children.

Investigations into allegations are prompt and appropriate. Managers ensure that their communication with safeguarding professionals, such as designated officers and the police, is regular and effective. Staff attend and make valuable contributions to professional meetings that explore child protection issues.

A local authority social worker said:

[Foster carer's name] always attends meetings regarding the young person and contributes positively to meetings. She is in constant communication with the social worker and always provides relevant updates. The young person reports that they feel safe and supported.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are ambitious and strive for continual improvement; many aspects of the agency's leadership and management are sound. The registered manager is experienced and qualified, and he receives support from the responsible individual and one other director. The agency's development plan supports continued improvement. This includes plans to recruit more foster carers.

The fostering service's preparation of foster carers is effective. This ensures that prospective foster carers have good insight into the needs of children, and that they are equipped to meet identified needs.

The training of foster carers is good. Most foster carers have completed identified core training and have received suitable support to enable them to meet development standards. However, not all foster carers have personal development plans. This creates a missed opportunity to ensure that any identified development or training needs are met.

Managers are yet to provide foster carers with training in relation to working in partnership with other professionals. This is a gap in foster carers' development that should be addressed, because the training would be useful in promoting effective collaborative working. Ineffective partnership working has been a feature of the complaints made about some foster carers.

Leaders and managers provide foster carers and staff with excellent support and supervision. A foster carer said: 'Staff offer very good support and there is excellent communication between us. Staff are knowledgeable about what they are doing and are professional. That's very important.'

Members of the staff team and students were complimentary about the management of the agency. A member of staff said:

I was a student here, and now I'm an employee. It's even better. I get regular supervision, am familiar with things not related to being a student and am enjoying working closely with the manager. I'm ready for social work!

There are clear lines of accountability. Managers and staff are clear about the staff's roles and responsibilities. Social work staff are qualified and experienced. Staff receive excellent support and supervision. However, the registered manager has not

had an appraisal in order to ensure that any learning or development needs are identified and met.

The agency's fostering panel operates effectively. The panel undertakes appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective. However, managers are yet to appoint a vice-chair or a representative with expertise in health. The foster carers' assessments presented at the fostering panel are of a high standard.

The fostering service works in close partnership with other professionals. A local authority social worker said: 'The support is helpful. The supervising social worker is always in communication and demonstrates a good ability to work in partnership around the child's needs.'

Feedback from stakeholders about this fostering service was overwhelmingly positive. Most stakeholders said that the fostering service provides safe placements and that children have good experiences and make steady progress.

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>This relates to ensuring that foster carers are trained in adult protection policies for parent and child placements, and partnership working with other professionals.</p>	1 February 2022
<p>The fostering provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p>	1 January 2022

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that the matching tool, risk assessments and safe care plans are sufficiently detailed. Safe care strategies are to be drawn up for individual children in order to keep children safe. Documents are to be kept updated. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered provider should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 20.5)
- The registered provider should ensure that that the number, skills, knowledge, and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient. The registered person should appoint a vice-chair and a panel member with expertise in health. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 14.8)

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: 2563888

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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