

Fusion Fostering North West

Fusion Fostering Limited

103 Business First, 12A Meadway, Shuttleworth Mead, Padiham, Burnley BB12 7NG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fusion Fostering North West is a branch of a privately run national fostering agency. The agency offers a range of foster placements including long-term, short-term and emergency foster care placements for children from birth up to age 17. When children reach the age of 18, they can remain living with their foster carers as young adults.

Fusion Fostering North West was registered in August 2016. The current manager registered on 24 July 2020.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 30 fostering households, caring for 42 children.

This inspection involved a blended approach of both on-site and off-site activity. Children and foster carers were spoken to during the inspection.

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: 17 to 21 January 2022

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	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 7 August 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are the main focus of this agency. Foster carers and staff regularly go 'above and beyond' to provide care that is child centred, individualised and aspirational. Most children enjoy trusting, secure relationships with their foster carers and agency staff. These relationships underpin the progress that children make.

Children are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of living with their foster carers. They say they are listened to and feel included in decisions about their care. Children's cultural and identity needs are respected and well promoted. They are supported to develop their self-esteem and social networks through access to new opportunities and activities.

Children's health needs are well understood. Foster carers strongly advocate for the children in their care to ensure that their health needs are being met. Carers have access to detailed health and well-being plans and there are clear medication processes in place.

Staff and carers have high aspirations for children. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated. Education is well promoted. Ongoing communication with education providers ensures that any issues are quickly resolved. Older children are supported to attend further education and secure apprenticeships or employment.

The challenges faced due to COVID-19 have been well managed. Clear processes were implemented to ensure that carers and children continued to be seen on a regular basis and that they remained connected to the agency. Carers are highly positive about the support they receive. One carer said: 'We are extremely proud of being foster carers with Fusion. We simply cannot praise them enough for their structured support, kindness and love they show to all.'

Robust processes are in place to carefully match children with foster carers who can meet their needs. Supervising social workers and managers are integral to decision-making. Due to delays in the delivery of some training during the pandemic, a small number of children were placed prior to carers accessing identified training. The agency creatively provided relevant information and guidance to ensure that carers had the required skills and that children's needs were fully understood.

Children are supported to move to their foster placement in a planned way. They are given information about the agency, but this is not always in a format they can understand. The agency is effective in maintaining placements for children. It implements high levels of support to prevent children's placements ending in an unplanned way.

The agency seeks to keep families together. A number of children live with their siblings in long-term, stable placements, thus enabling them to retain their family

identity. In line with children's plans, foster carers and agency staff regularly support children to safely see people who are important to them. Several children have been given permanence with their foster families. Once children turn 18, they are supported to stay with their foster family into adulthood.

Concerns regarding the standard of care provided by some foster carers have been swiftly addressed by the agency. It has taken appropriate action to minimise the impact on children and has used any learning to further strengthen practice across the service.

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

Children say they feel happy and safe with their foster carers. Carers are vigilant to risks and understand how to respond. They have access to robust plans that provide practical information, identify risks and include strategies to safely manage risk and respond to children's individual needs. Any concerns are appropriately shared with other professionals, and communication with other services is excellent.

Children's plans are regularly reviewed and updated with the child's voice reflected throughout. Children are involved in age-appropriate discussions about risk to help them develop their understanding of their vulnerabilities and to make safer choices. Consequently, only a low number of children experience high-risk behaviours.

Since the previous inspection, the agency has changed its operational model. Care partners, who were previously independent, are now employed by the agency as supervising social workers. Recruitment records highlight that the recruitment and selection process is robust and has exceeded safe recruitment practice to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to safeguard children.

The agency undertakes appropriate checks and references during assessments of prospective foster carers. Assessment reports are comprehensive and analytical, enabling clear, objective approval decisions to be made within required timescales.

Foster carer reviews and supervisions reflect appropriate challenge. Investigations into allegations are appropriately shared with relevant agencies. The agency has taken appropriate action when carers are no longer suitable to foster.

Following significant safeguarding incidents, the agency has provided a high level of support to children, foster carers and staff. Staff work in partnership with statutory agencies to safeguard children and review their practice as required. Any learning identified from investigations is used to inform wider service development and strengthen practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency has undergone significant changes to its operational model and staff team since the last inspection. A new manager has been appointed. She has the necessary skills and experience and is working towards the relevant qualification.

The manager has been instrumental in implementing stability and galvanising the team to improve outcomes for children.

The manager is held in high regard by children, carers, staff and other professionals. The team benefits from her clear leadership and guidance and she is creating a culture that is inspirational and ambitious for children.

A deputy operations director and responsible individual support the manager. Together, they are a visible and approachable leadership team. They recognise the agency's strengths and have implemented clear plans to further develop the service. The leadership team has clear expectations of staff, carers and managers. This is balanced alongside providing them with high levels of support and has led to staff and foster carers feeling highly appreciated and valued.

The manager ensures she has robust oversight of the service, fostering business and children's outcomes. Effective monitoring systems enable her to recognise patterns and trends, taking appropriate action as required. The agency's electronic recording systems are exceptionally well maintained and clearly demonstrate the journey for children and foster carers.

The agency's fostering panel is diverse and inclusive. Panel appraisals take place as required. Panel minutes are detailed and reflect panel discussions with a clear rationale for recommendations. Decisions are shared with applicants and carers as required.

The three requirements and eight recommendations made at the previous inspection have been met.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. In particular, to ensure that carers have access to training for the type of placement they are offering prior to any children being placed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that copies of the children's guide and other key documents are available in a format that is accessible by the child. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.12)

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: 1225624

Registered provider: Fusion Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Old Mill, Maltravers House, Petters Way, Yeovil,
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Responsible individual: David Tucker

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Inspectors

Caroline Bertram, Social Care Inspector
Sarah Oldham, Social Care Inspector

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