

Aim High Fostering Services

Aim High Fostering Services Ltd

M25 Business Centre Ltd, 121 Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey EN9 1JH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted on 7 October 2016. The current manager was registered with Ofsted on 17 November 2020. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 11 foster carers and 18 children living in foster homes.

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: 14 to 18 February 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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 11 December 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 benefit from high-quality and individualised care that is helping them to achieve positive outcomes. Nurturing and experienced foster carers receive support from the agency to help children make small but significant progress. For example, improving speech, growing in confidence, and becoming more independent.

Children live with foster carers who the agency have carefully matched to ensure that they can meet their needs. This allows children to settle quickly and for relationships to flourish. Many children have been matched permanently with their foster families which provides stability and security for them.

Foster carers receive a high level of support, guidance and advice both practically and emotionally from their supervising social workers. Positive relationships exist between foster carers, who support one another and describe the agency as 'one big family'. The registered manager is a strong advocate for children and foster carers, and this has ensured that additional allowances, help with transport to school and other essential services have been secured.

The agency's participation officer encourages children to be involved in the services provided. Regular activities take place where children can come together, enjoy themselves and meet with supervising social workers to provide feedback. Children helped to write questions for the recruitment of new staff recently and the agency is currently considering how they can be involved in writing questions for use at the panel.

Children are supported to be healthy, attend school regularly and enjoy a range of new experiences and activities. Foster carers provide children with regular routines and clear boundaries which helps them to feel safe and well cared for. Family time is facilitated by foster carers who understand the importance of keeping children in touch with important people and promoting their positive identity.

Children are encouraged to learn self-care skills and develop their confidence in taking care of themselves and preparing for independence. The agency is developing a range of self-care booklets for foster carers to work through with older children in preparation for independent living.

Foster carers say that they feel welcomed and valued and that they sought out this agency because they like a small agency and individualised care. They enjoyed and found useful the preparation training and the ongoing training provided.

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

Risks are identified by skilled and experienced practitioners at the point of enquiry and are used to match children's needs with carers' skills and experience. This process takes into consideration any other children already living with foster carers

and how any presenting risks can be reduced or safely managed. This ensures that children only go to live in foster homes where their needs can be met thus increasing the security and stability of the arrangement. Local authorities are sent a copy of this matching tool before any final decisions about suitability are made.

The agency complete and regularly update both 'safer caring' plans and risk assessments with the foster carer, the child and the local authority. These documents set out clear expectations for all aspects of daily care and any emerging risks so that they can be managed as safely as possible.

Other aspects of the service provided to ensure children's safety includes health and safety assessments, pet assessments and vehicle document checks. These aspects of care protect children by ensuring that foster carers provide a safe environment for both living and travelling.

Foster carers receive monthly supervision, providing guidance and support on all aspects of care. In addition, they receive 'unannounced' visits at least once per year to undertake checks of the home environment including children's bedrooms. Most children receive regular visits from the supervising social workers where they can report any concerns or worries they may have about their foster homes. The agency has not consistently visited all children due to the impact of COVID-19 and staffing issues, however leaders and managers are aware of this shortfall and are seeking to improve this.

Foster carers are well prepared and supported to understand the safeguarding of children both through their preparation and ongoing training. The agency offers support to individual carers in the circumstances where allegations have been made as well as offering post-approval training about allegations.

The agency has a safeguarding policy. Experienced supervising social workers know how to report child protection concerns to the local authority or designated officer when any issues are raised. There was one incident that was not notified to the regulator, however, appropriate safeguarding processes had otherwise been followed.

All children fostered by the agency have a 'grab pack' missing information sheet, which includes all relevant information required for reporting children missing from care to the police. The pack includes basic information which may help to identify the children, their location, or alert the police to any specific needs or vulnerabilities that should be considered.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency has an effective, permanent and experienced registered manager. The responsible individual and director, alongside the registered manager, present a strong leadership team who are committed and ambitious for children.

Leaders and managers know the children well and they pride themselves on providing an agency with a family feel which encourages progress in all areas of children's development. This is promoted through the ongoing training, support, activities, and participation on offer.

The agency has had some short-term turnover of workers which has created difficulties in providing the level of consistency they aspire to. This has been beyond the agency's control but has impacted on the consistency of visits to a few children.

Staff feel supported and have described excellent induction, training, and development opportunities with this agency. Staff caseloads are at a level which allows them to offer a good level of support to carers. Staff benefit from regular, reflective supervision and comprehensive appraisals. This helps leaders and managers to target training and identify areas of positive practice, and areas for development.

Leaders and managers have fully accepted that at times their own supervision has not been consistent. No detriment or impact is seen as a result of this shortfall and an immediate and positive response was made. This indicates that leaders and managers know their service well and are working hard to identify where there are areas for improvement and are taking action to improve.

The agency is not meeting all the objectives of its statement of purpose. Shortfalls which have been identified, include the frequency of visits to children, supervision of managers and the availability of placements on offer.

The agency has developed very positive working relationships with partner agencies, and they are well respected. Several professionals were spoken to as part of this inspection, and all gave very positive feedback on the experiences and care offered to children. The key areas of praise are in respect of the experience and skills of the foster carers, good communication, attendance and participation in meetings and updates provided on children's progress and on any incidents of concern.

Children's care planning is actively promoted by leaders and managers who challenge placing authorities to ensure that children's needs are met and that correct paperwork is provided.

Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity through the recruitment of foster carers who include mixed gender, single carers, same sex couples, and black and ethnic minority carers. Good consideration is given to race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture and dietary needs. For example, to ensure that interpreters or carers can speak a child's first language or can promote a Halal diet.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. Specifically, to ensure that children receive a consistent level of visits by the fostering agency's social workers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 1.7)
- The registered provider should ensure that suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person or manager of a local authority fostering service. Specifically, to ensure that both the registered manager and the responsible individual receive consistent supervision. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 49, paragraph 24.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. Specifically, to ensure that all services offered within the statement of purpose are available. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 33, paragraph 16.1)
- The registered person should ensure there is a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. Specifically, ensure that any instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents is notified. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 57, paragraph 29.1 and schedule 7)

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: 1241499

Registered provider: Aim High Fostering Services Ltd

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Inspector

Christine Kennet, Social Care Inspector

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