

Horizon Fostering Services

Horizon Fostering Services Ltd

Kingsbury House, 468 Church Lane, Kingsbury, London NW9 8UA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in London. The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term, respite and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 30 approved fostering households providing care to 23 children.

A manager has been appointed. The manager's application has been submitted to Ofsted.

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: 7 to 11 March 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: 15 May 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

Overall, the children have positive experiences of living with their fostering families. The children are happy and feel like valued members of the family. For example, one child told the inspector that they felt so happy that they were living with a loving family with kind hearts. Another child informed the inspector that he was very happy living with his foster carers.

The agency seeks to keep families together. Several children live with their siblings in stable placements. In line with the children's care plans, the foster carers support them to have safe contact with people who are important to them. This enables the children to maintain strong family links.

Many of the children are living with their foster carers under long-term plans, meaning that they can live with them until they reach 18 years of age. In addition, children can stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday under 'staying put' arrangements. Positively, during the inspection, the inspector noted several 'staying put' arrangements. This level of stability enhances the children's sense of belonging and provides them with ongoing support in developing essential life skills.

The progress of unaccompanied children is exceptional from their starting points. For example, one unaccompanied child, who barely spoke English to start with, has now secured a place at university. Every effort is made to match unaccompanied children with foster carers who can meet the children's cultural needs and ensure that they have access to a wide range of support.

Children's healthcare needs are understood by their foster carers. They manage the children's medical and treatment plans effectively, including those children with complex health needs. Children are supported to attend all routine and specialist health appointments.

The agency has a good oversight of children's education. Most children who attend school and college are making good progress. For example, one child who had not been in education for over two years is now attending college on a regular basis. Furthermore, the agency has worked together with the local authority to provide additional funding to help secure the child's placement at college. This demonstrates that children who have a history of non-attendance are supported well to re-engage in education.

Carers encourage the children to take part in fun and new experiences. The children take part in a variety of activities suited to their interests and hobbies. As a result, the children increase their self-confidence and extend their social networks.

Overall, the children are matched well and they are settled with their foster carers. However, on one occasion poor matching for an emergency placement resulted in

children being placed with a carer who was not able to meet their needs or behaviours. The placement lasted no more than 24 hours. The manager was quick to respond to the incident and implemented immediate changes, which now include clear management oversight. Subsequent emergency placements have been matched well with children remaining with their carer until final decisions have been made.

Children are not always actively encouraged to provide their feedback to help to support improvements within the agency. The children's feedback is integral and can be used to make child-centred improvements. The manager is aware of this shortfall and is taking steps to develop the children's feedback and participation. This is in the early stages and is not yet embedded within the agency.

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

Children reported that they feel safe in their foster homes. They can identify people who they can talk to. One child told the inspector that they felt 'very safe' living with their foster carer.

Foster carers understand children's individual vulnerabilities. They provide nurturing care that enables children to develop their understanding of risk and how to make safer decisions. As a result of the care provided, the children are making positive progress from their starting points.

Carers are well prepared and supported to manage behaviours and situations that might challenge them. Carers receive training in behaviour management and implement boundaries that help children to feel increasingly safe. The appointment of an in-house therapist will further assist carers to support children in managing their behaviours.

The risk assessments and safer carer plans are detailed and effective. These plans are individualised and provide carers with clear guidance around supporting and managing risk-taking behaviours. This in turn helps to reduce risk and helps to keep children safe.

Some children are known to self-harm. In each case, the agency has acted appropriately and effectively in order to help to keep children who self-harm safe.

Children are regularly seen by supervising social workers, and two unannounced visits to carers take place every year. An effective out-of-hours service means that foster carers can speak to a supervising social worker any time of the day should this be needed. Good formal and informal support enables foster carers to continue to offer care in challenging circumstances and maintain placements in the longer term.

The recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers is of good quality. Supervising social workers carry out thorough background checks and ensure that information is complete before recommendations are made. The minutes of panel

meetings are clear and show enough detail for the agency decision maker to make informed decisions.

When children make allegations, these are promptly referred to the local area designated officer and other professionals, to promote the safety and welfare of children. Where there are concerns, the agency takes this to panel and recommends deregistration of fostering households. However, the agency does not always follow through on all recommendations set. This has not had an impact on children or resulted in any safeguarding concerns.

When children go missing from care, foster carers follow missing from care plans and share information in a timely way. They demonstrate a good understanding of their responsibilities and make a positive contribution to keeping children safe. When children return home, the agency does not always ensure that return home interviews are completed. This means that children are not provided with the opportunity to discuss and explore the reason why they were missing and the risks they were exposed to during the time they were missing from care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is passionate and committed and creates the right environment for staff to work effectively. She knows and understands the strengths and weaknesses of the service. She has good monitoring systems in place. These include regular practice development meetings which are effective at identifying shortfalls in practice.

Staff feel well supported. They receive regular supervision that enables them to reflect on their practice. Their performance is regularly appraised, and this informs their development needs. Staff have access to a good range of relevant, good-quality training that enables them to improve their knowledge and practice and support the foster carers and children effectively.

Foster carers enjoy support groups. This provides foster carers with regular opportunities to discuss the demands of the role in a safe environment and to share good practice. A foster carer described the agency as 'fantastic'. Another carer informed the inspector that the support from the agency was 'amazing'.

Panel members are suitably vetted and qualified. 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. Similarly, the agency decision maker makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions, demonstrating a good level of reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process.

Since the previous inspection, an independent reviewing officer has been employed. This provides another level of scrutiny of the approval of foster carers. Clear reasons for recommendations are made and any concerns are taken to the next available panel for its consideration.

The agency's partnership working with the professional network benefits children. Overall, the children's social workers gave very positive feedback about the communication with the agency, the professionalism of staff and the skills of foster carers. When any concerns have been raised, the manager has taken appropriate action to ensure that any issues are addressed.

Commissioners from placing authorities spoke positively about the agency and the care foster carers provide to children. Commissioners spoke about how responsive and supportive the agency is, especially when placements are required outside of office hours.

Foster carers are provided with, and have completed, their mandatory training. The agency is proactive in sourcing additional training for carers in line with the children they care for. During the inspection, the inspector noted that carers had undertaken radicalisation and extremism training as well as training around county lines and knife crime. A foster carer told the inspector that training provided is 'great'. However, not all foster carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have not completed quarterly or annual monitoring reports. The lack of a comprehensive report does not support the agency to effectively scrutinise the service. The manager recognises this shortfall and has taken steps to address this. However, at the time of the inspection, no report had been submitted to Ofsted.

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 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)(b) (3))</p>	17 April 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 8, paragraph 1.3)
- The registered person should ensure that when a child goes missing from care and there is concern for their welfare, or at the request of a child who has been missing, the fostering service arranges a meeting in private between the child and the responsible authority to consider the reasons for their going missing. This relates to ensuring that the placing local authority offers children a meeting to discuss why they went missing from care. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 16, paragraph 5.9)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained within the

expected timeframes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 40, paragraph 20.3)

- The registered person should ensure there is a comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken, and the decisions reached. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 45, paragraph 22.7)

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: SC034908

Registered provider: Horizon Fostering Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Kingsbury House, 468 Church Lane, London NW9 8UA

Responsible individual: Shadab Ahmad

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspector

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

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