

Ownlife Fostering

Ownlife Fostering Limited

Dexter Business Centre, 3-5 Sandpit Road, Dartford DA1 5BU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a small, independent, privately owned agency. Ofsted granted registration in 2013 for the agency to provide a full range of fostering services. It currently has 13 foster families, three of whom have been recruited in the last 12 months. There are 12 children receiving a service including a sibling group.

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 March 2022

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: 12 March 2018

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 and young people are happy, settled and receiving good care in their foster families. Social workers are positive about the care children are receiving. Feedback from social workers includes: 'Foster carers love the child as if she was their own,' and, 'Since being placed with their carers, the children have progressed greatly and have settled into the new placement and school really well and are thriving.'

Children make progress as a result of good planning and matching with their foster carers. Children and foster carers benefit from a good transition period in which they get to know each other. Children feel part of their foster families and make good progress physically, emotionally and educationally.

The agency supports long-term care of children through permanency and 'staying put' arrangements. As a result, children are provided with stability, consistent care and a stronger support network into adulthood.

Children are supported by foster carers to maintain and develop relationships with people who are important to them, for example, spending time with their parents or siblings who have been adopted, and having friends at the home for tea. This promotes children's identity and sense of belonging.

Children engage in a range of activities and after-school clubs, including dance, martial arts, Cubs, swimming lessons and being helped to ride a bike. Foster carers and the agency talk highly of children's achievements in all aspects of their lives. The agency sends children certificates of achievement to support their self-esteem and in recognition of their abilities.

Foster carers take children on holiday, including going to Africa, Poland, Gran Canaria and an upcoming holiday to Jamaica. These experiences help children have a greater understanding of the wider world and their cultural heritage. They positively create new memories and experience new cultures. One child proudly showed the inspector a picture he had taken with a dolphin on his recent holiday.

The agency seeks children's feelings and wishes regularly and advocates on their behalf. Children actively take part in important meetings that are about them. The agency hosts activity days for children and their carers. This promotes positive relationships with children, carers and staff.

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

The agency deals with allegations and complaints in a timely manner. The manager shares information with appropriate agencies and refers investigations to be carried out by an independent person. Investigations are impartial and thorough. Where practices have fallen short of the required standards of care, there is appropriate oversight and decision-making by the panel.

Children told the inspector that they feel safe living with their carers and they like their carers. Some children have chosen to call them mummy and daddy. One child said she was '100 out of 10 happy' living with her foster carers. Children identify their foster carers as people they can trust and talk to. When children have shared their lived experiences with carers and these give cause for concern, foster carers are quick to raise it with the agency and follow appropriate safeguarding measures.

Children who go missing receive well-coordinated care. The agency supports carers to understand and implement the appropriate missing-from-home procedures. The agency ensures other professionals are aware of concerns and hold professional meetings to try and reduce risks to children. When the risk is too great and children's care plans change, foster carers remain committed to children and support their transitions.

When children become involved with the criminal justice system, foster carers support them well. They advocate for them and act as their appropriate adult. Foster carers feel well supported at times of increased stress when children are missing or involved with police and have access to 24/7 support via the agency. Foster carers and children are also supported by a clinical psychologist who works with the agency. Foster carers have praised this input and consider it of great benefit to them and the children.

In recognition of foster carers' well-being and the impact this has on them caring for children, the agency has a good focus on well-being. This includes group yoga and a monthly foster carers' support meeting. Throughout the inspection, foster carers said the staff at the agency were 'supportive', 'caring' and 'committed to the young people and children'.

During times of restrictions in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the agency creatively moved unannounced visits to being virtual. However, this practice does not lend itself to checking the home environment or ensuring that children are safeguarded effectively. The agency has now returned to face-to-face unannounced visits.

It has been agreed with the placing authority that two siblings can share a bedroom. However, the agency and placing authority have not worked together with the foster carers and children to assess this decision thoroughly and record this appropriately. As a result, a recommendation is made to enhance this practice.

The use of physical intervention by foster carers is minimal. Foster carers are trained to use secure base, de-escalation and positive behaviour support. However, when there is the need to physically intervene to prevent a child or someone else being harmed, foster carers should have been trained to do so. This was a requirement from the previous inspection that has not been met, and as a result this has been restated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is experienced and appropriately qualified. She is passionate about children receiving good care and carers being well supported. She knows all of the children and carers well and has a good oversight of the agency.

Professionals, carers and staff all give positive feedback about the manager and the service the agency provides. All of them say that because the agency is small, staff know the carers and children well. There is 24/7 support offered by someone who knows and understands each family and any current concerns.

However, there are shortfalls in the leadership and management that mean this aspect requires improvement to be good. The manager recognises this and she is focused on implementing change and has plans to make improvements.

The manager understands the service and has implemented a development plan to make improvements. This has ensured that all previous recommendations and requirements have been met since the last inspection, with the exception of foster carers' training which remains outstanding and has been restated.

New foster carers have been recruited with due diligence to ensure they are safe to work with children. However, the recruitment of panel members has not been so thoroughly scrutinised. When panel members have worked with children and vulnerable adults, previous employers have not been verified.

The agency's panel is diverse and offers a wealth of experience and knowledge. However, the agency has not ensured that panel members have received thorough inductions. A recommendation has been raised to improve this practice, regardless of how well experienced panel members are.

The agency has breached timescales for the first panel review of newly approved foster carers. Although this has not impacted on the good-quality care children receive, it does not ensure proper scrutiny and oversight of the carers' first year.

Foster carers, social workers and the manager feel well supported in their roles. They receive regular supervision. However, supervision records are not detailed enough to allow for accountability should concerns be identified in the future.

The registered manager's supervision is being carried out by the agency decision-maker. This impacts on the agency decision-maker's ability to be impartial, as they are party to information before it is reviewed by the panel.

On one occasion, foster carers were not adequately supported in the absence of their supervising social worker. For example, foster carers did not fully understand the role of their delegated authority and its limits. As a result, children were cared for by a person who had not been agreed by the children's placing authority.

Children's records are not always completed daily as required. For two children, there are many gaps in their records. Managers are aware of this and have raised this as a concern with the foster carers and followed this through in their annual review. Some records for another child are written negatively. The manager has identified this as a point of learning for the foster carer. Recommendations have been made to improve practice in record-keeping.

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 in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>This specifically refers to the registered person ensuring that processes for unannounced visits to foster carers' homes are arranged so as to safeguard children.</p>	18 May 2022
<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 specifically relates to offering specific training on child sexual exploitation, self-harm, restraint and the individual diagnoses of children.</p> <p>This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.</p>	18 May 2022
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p>	18 May 2022

<p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This specifically relates to panel members' previous roles with children and/or vulnerable adults being verified, with reasons why they left the employment, as per schedule 1.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>This specifically relates to all staff, including the registered manager, receiving in-depth, practice-related supervision.</p>	18 May 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration. (Regulation 28 (5))</p>	18 May 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider should take into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment should be recorded in writing where bedroom-sharing is agreed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 10.6)
- The registered person should ensure that all foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable them to provide consistent, high-quality care to the child. This relates to carers having adequate support and information when the allocated supervising social worker is absent. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.6)
- The registered person should ensure that each person on the central list is given induction training which is completed within 10 weeks of joining the central list. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.9)

- The registered person should ensure that children's daily records are completed as required and in line with agency policy and procedures. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.1)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the panel passes its recommendations on to the decision-maker for a decision to be made on behalf of the fostering service. Since no member of the fostering panel is permitted to take part in deciding to approve a person as a foster carer, the panel chair should not be in a position to discuss the case with the decision-maker and the recommendations should be passed on by way of the written minutes of the panel meeting, setting out the main points of discussion and reasons for the recommendation. Staff of the fostering service who are involved in decision-making about approval of carers, such as supervising social workers and team managers, cannot be involved in a decision to approve a foster carer if they are on a panel. In particular, this relates to ensuring that the agency's processes for supervision, panel advice and the agency decision-maker are sufficiently independent. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Service', page 43, 5.23)

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: SC454491

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Inspectors

Jodie Lewis, Social Care Inspector
Christine Bennet, Her Majesty's Inspector

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