

Fostering UK

Fostering UK Limited

Maple House, Potters Bar EN6 5BS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency provides support to 58 children in 38 foster households. The agency can provide bridging, respite, short-term, long-term, permanent, and parent and child placements. The fostering agency has contracts with a range of placing local authorities.

The suitably qualified and experienced manager registered in December 2020.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 June 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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 4 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children are thoughtfully matched with their foster carers. Children are provided with information about the foster carers and, when possible, visit the carers or have a video call before they move in. Children are each provided with a welcome pack which is personalised to them. One child was very proud of their personalised planet-patterned quilt, which showed them that the agency had thought about their particular interests.

Most children benefit from good stability with their fostering families. The children live in caring homes where they receive the individualised care and support that they need. Children grow in confidence and maturity as valued members of the fostering family.

Children are making good progress in education because of the encouragement of their foster carers and the effective advocacy of the agency's staff. On one occasion, staff were particularly influential in securing suitable educational provision for a child. The carer said, 'They [the agency staff] did not stop until it was sorted.'

Foster carers recognise that positive mental health is as important as physical well-being. The agency training helps foster carers develop an understanding of attachment and trauma. Foster carers appreciate the importance of birth family relationships. Carers support meaningful relationships between children and the people who are important to them.

Staff celebrate children's personal achievements. Children enjoy individual leisure interests such as spending time with friends, going to the gym and attending clubs. They build happy memories of family experiences and rites of passage such as planning for the school prom. One child spoke of their pride at having recently achieved a brown belt in mixed martial arts.

The agency supports carers to consider caring for children after their 18th birthday. Agency staff work effectively with other professionals to support the children to remain with their foster carers when those carers transfer into, or out of, the agency. This child-centred approach helps the children's sense of permanence and stability within the fostering family.

Foster carers consistently describe highly positive relationships with their agency social workers. The agency, on occasion, uses a blended approach of virtual and face-to-face supervisory visits to foster carers. However, agency guidance on when this approach may be used and minimum expectations for the frequency of face-to-face visits are not clear. Supervision visit records do not always clearly reflect relevant discussions with foster carers.

Medication administration arrangements for one child do not fully protect the child or carer. This is because the arrangements are not clearly detailed and documented as agreed.

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

Foster carers and agency staff understand that their most important responsibility is to ensure that children are well safeguarded. The agency works effectively with partner agencies to safeguard children and ensure their well-being.

Children rarely go missing. When children have gone missing, foster carers have taken appropriate action to encourage the child's safe return and welcome them home. Foster carers and agency staff work with the child's placing authority to try to understand the factors which influence risk.

The agency responds appropriately to any concerns in respect of foster carers. The good use of panel to consider internal standards of care reviews provides further levels of transparent scrutiny. However, the agency's policies and procedures do not clearly state how any issues relating to standards of care concerns or allegations will be managed when foster carers are in the process of transferring agency. This is particularly relevant as several foster carers have transferred into, or moved on from, the agency.

Agency staff ensure that household health and safety checks are made before approval and are updated yearly. However, sometimes there is a lack of attention to detail and records are not clear. On one occasion, no documented safety discussion or risk assessment was made when a carer purchased a hot tub. On occasion, household safer care policies have not been kept updated to reflect changes of adults in the household. The agency has carried out suitability checks on all adults in the house and there is no information to suggest that children have been placed at risk. However, this demonstrates a lack of consistent practice to identify and reduce risk.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The experienced and suitably qualified manager has led the agency effectively through a difficult period involving the COVID-19 pandemic and organisational change. She has overseen a cultural change at the agency. Staff and foster carers describe the manager in terms such as 'inspirational' and 'dynamic'. The manager has a good knowledge of the individual children and foster carers that the agency supports.

Some carers have left the agency due to a previous perceived lack of support. Despite this, the agency has grown since the last inspection. All the current carers, including those of long standing, are highly complimentary about the levels of support that they receive. They cited this support as a particular strength of the agency. One carer said, 'They [agency staff] have held my hand and guided me all

the way.' Another carer said, 'I don't feel like a number. I see the leaders of the company. They are visible and approachable.'

Most foster carers have completed their training and development standards. There are clear reasons and support plans in place for the small minority who have not. Foster carers benefit from a range of relevant training. However, the agency has been over-optimistic about the likely effectiveness of some training. First-aid training has taken place virtually, which limits carers' opportunity to practise the practical skills required. The single half-day safeguarding training covers child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and identifying and responding to radicalisation. Not exploring these areas in sufficient depth has the potential to reduce carers' ability to identify and address particular risks.

The staff are well supported and describe working in a non-blaming, reflective and learning culture. Staff benefit from regular effective case management supervision as well as highly present and accessible managers. However, one staff member employed as an independent social worker had not had an annual appraisal. Foster carers are not asked for feedback as part of the agency social worker appraisal system. As a result, opportunities for exploring agency social workers' strengths and areas for development are potentially missed.

The manager is aware that policies and procedures require reviewing and updating. However, this has yet to happen. Consequently, the safeguarding, allegations, training and foster carer supervision policies require further clarity.

Panel processes are effective. Agency staff have satisfied themselves of the suitability of applicants before approving them as foster carers. When children have been placed with carers outside of the carers' specified terms of approval, or the usual fostering limit, parenting capacity has been suitably explored.

There have been three agency decision-makers in the past 18 months. The most recent agency decision-maker is not a trustee, director or employed as a senior manager in the fostering service. This undermines the accountability and effectiveness of the agency decision-maker's pivotal role.

The manager maintains effective leadership and management oversight of the service and drive for improvement. While some recommendations have been set to further improve the agency, this does not detract from the good care and support that children and their foster carers receive.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any household risk assessment and safer care agreements. Furthermore, ensure that these assessments are updated to reflect changes of resident household members. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities, including that avoidable hazards are removed, as is consistent with a family home. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 10.3)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers undertake suitable quality first-aid and preventing radicalisation training, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' files include clear records of supervisory meetings and the matters discussed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the agency policies and procedures provide clear information about what constitutes a standard of care concern. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service's decision-maker is a senior person within the fostering service or is a trustee or director of the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.12)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, when they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children that the service is providing for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.6)
- The registered person should ensure that management of the service ensures all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the service's policies and procedures. Furthermore, ensure that the service's policies and procedures detail the actions that the agency will take in respect of safeguarding allegations and standard of care concerns when foster carers are transferring to or from the agency. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.3)

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: 1243868

Registered provider: Fostering UK Limited

Registered provider address: Maple House, High Street, Potters Bar,
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Responsible individual: Rebecca McGrory

Registered manager: Dawn Jeffs

Telephone number: 0333 0448890

Inspectors

Joanna Heller, Social Care Inspector

Rosie Davie, Social Care Inspector

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