

# Fostering Support Group: London Office

Fostering Support Group Limited

5th Floor, Metropolitan House, 3 Darkes Lane, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 1AG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

First established in 1989, Fostering Support Group provides fostering services in the Kent and Greater London area.

The agency provides emergency, short- and long-term foster placements for children of all ages who have a range of care needs. The agency also provides parent and child placements.

There are currently 41 fostering households with 67 foster carers. There are a total of 52 children and young people in placement.

The registered manager of the agency was registered with Ofsted in September 2017.

### Inspection dates: 13 to 17 June 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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:** 30 July 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 thrive in nurturing foster placements which are dedicated to meeting their aspirations and needs. Children's comments include, 'This made my life happier, I'm a lot happier than before I came to live with [the foster carer]'. A placing authority social worker said, 'I would certainly use this agency again, the supervising social worker has been brilliant.'

Foster carers value children's education and strongly advocate for additional resources and the most appropriate schools to meet children's education needs. Children receive encouragement and support to learn important life skills, such as taking small steps to do more things independently, learning braille and holding part-time jobs. However, foster carer logs, foster carer and staff supervision records do not always demonstrate the experiences of children and the depth or quality of the support that they receive. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that children's records provide information about their experiences. This compromises management oversight.

Children benefit from good matching processes, which help them to settle quickly into their foster homes and develop positive relationships. Foster carers say that they receive good information prior to children coming into their care, and that they are never put under pressure to accept placements. However, not all foster families have child-friendly profiles. The agency has identified the inconsistencies in foster family profiles and has plans in place to improve them.

There is good attention paid to the cultural needs of children, enabling them to learn more about themselves and integrate into family life. The agency has further improved its mother and baby foster placements by introducing foster carers to parents virtually. One carer said, 'This has helped parents manage the initial anxiety of meeting the foster carer for the first time.' Parents in parent and child placements highlight in a positive way how foster carers have helped them.

Children receive very good physical and mental health support. Foster carers care for children with varying disabilities effectively. Foster carers work well with specialist services, and there are very good examples of carers taking advice and supporting children to achieve positive outcomes. One specialist said, 'Children are safe, fundamentally secure with their carer and are doing really well.'

Older children have varying degrees of independence. Foster carers make every effort to prepare children for adult life. The agency has implemented a structured independent living skills programme, which foster carers have found helpful when targeting the support for young people. Some young people stay on with their foster families beyond the age of 18 and continue to receive guidance and support from foster carers.

Children also have the opportunity to socialise together at Christmas parties and summer events. The agency has introduced a care experienced young person to engage with children to champion their voices. This has enabled children to have a greater influence within the agency; for example, children's views have helped shape recruitment questions for supervising social workers.

Children have good opportunities to speak with staff in private when they complete home visits. However, the agency does not consistently keep good records of whether children are seen and spoken to by the supervising social workers, and children's views are not consistently or fully recorded. This compromises management oversight of children's experiences.

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

Children benefit from good safeguarding arrangements. Children report that they feel safe. One child said, '[I] feel safe here, animals make me feel safe, the presence of other people make me feel safe. I get on with [the foster carers].'

Staff ensure that placement plans address any changing needs and that strategies are in place to help reduce risk-taking behaviour. For example, staff complete risk assessments soon after placements start. These are updated regularly and help to identify known and potential risks to children's safety. Foster carers devise safe care plans. However, risk assessments and safe care plans are not always sufficiently detailed or explicit about what safe care strategies are to be used with individual children. This does not help to keep children safe.

There have been incidents of children going missing from home and suspicions of children's involvement in child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation. Some children are known to self-harm. In each case, the agency has acted appropriately and effectively to help to keep children safe.

Children and foster carers receive highly effective individualised support from the agency's supervising social workers. Stability meetings are requested to ensure that children receive the necessary support to enable them to continue living in their foster home when the placement is fragile. The agency is proactive in finding solutions to try and help children and foster carers through difficult times.

There is a strong relationship with the local safeguarding partners, which enables staff and foster carers to be responsive to children's changing needs. Training has helped to increase foster carers' awareness of issues relating to child protection, neglect, social media, children going missing from home, and child sexual and criminal exploitation. This strengthens safeguarding practice.

Where there has been an issue of standards of care, the agency has worked well with placing authorities and designated officers to investigate and resolve concerns. Foster carers are supported with new training and enhanced supervision where required.

The agency continues to maintain high standards in relation to recruiting staff and foster carers. This ensures that only people who are suitable and competent are allowed to provide care and support for children. The fostering panel provides good scrutiny and challenge to ensure that these high standards are maintained.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. Staff conduct checks that ensure that homes are well maintained and comfortable, and that there are no health and safety concerns.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager is an experienced and suitably qualified social worker with a level 5 diploma in the leadership and management of social care. The manager has provided strong support to staff, foster carers, and children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leaders and managers are ambitious and strive for continual improvement; many aspects of the agency's leadership and management are sound. However, recent changes to staffing and recruitment have impacted on the quality of the agency's records. The agency's development plan supports continued improvement. This includes plans to improve the quality of records, recruit more foster carers, improve resources for foster carers and enhance children's participation.

Senior leaders have failed to notify the regulator of changes to the responsible individual status for the agency. This meant that the regulator was unable to communicate with the agency in the absence of the registered manager. This is a breach of regulations and has resulted in a requirement being raised.

Foster carers overwhelmingly say that the support they receive from the fostering service is excellent. Staff maintain good communication with foster carers and regularly visit them and children at their homes. Managers' and staff's communication with other professionals is effective and consistent.

Leaders and managers pride themselves on their wish for 'quality rather than quantity' and to have an agency which provides 'a personal touch'. A good example of this is providing gift vouchers for all children looked after by the agency, and providing hampers for all foster carers during the festive period. Leaders and managers know all of the children and they positively refer to them as 'our children'. A foster carer said, 'We are very grateful for FSG's generosity. We enjoyed the Christmas dinner and dance, and thank you for the lovely hamper.' Another carer said, 'Feels like being part of a family and part of the team, feels like you are not alone.'

Staff and foster carers receive very good training. This supports them to provide safe, personalised care. Foster carers report that training is relevant and of a high quality.

Staff complete foster carer assessments that are of a good standard. The annual reviewing process is thorough. This promotes the regular review of foster carers' suitability to continue to care for children.

The agency's fostering panel operates effectively and benefits from having a membership that is drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel.

# 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
The registered person must give notice in writing to the Chief Inspector without delay if any of the following events takes place or is proposed to take place—  there is to be any change in the identity of the responsible individual. (Regulation 39 (1)(iii))	29 July 2022

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that systems are in place to monitor all records to ensure compliance with the agency's policies to identify patterns and trends. In particular, the registered person should monitor records of when children are spoken with; monitor the quality of records relating to children's views and ensure that they are fully captured in records; monitor the quality of supervision records of foster carers and staff and monitor the quality of records that capture children's experiences in the carers' home such as carer logs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carer profiles are child friendly and provide information to children prior to the start of their placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.1)
- The registered person should ensure that risk assessments and safe care plans sufficiently detail the safe care strategies that are to be used with individual children in order to keep them safe. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)

## 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:** SC388487

**Registered provider:** Fostering Support Group Limited

**Registered provider address:** 5th Floor, Metropolitan House, 3 Darkes Lane,  
Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 1AG

**Responsible individual:** Beverley Senior

**Registered manager:** Jean Smith

## **Inspector**

Jayshree Pillay, Social Care Inspector

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