

Fostering Dimensions

Fostering Dimensions Limited

The Howitt Building, Unit V12, Nottingham Business Centre, Lenton Boulevard,
Nottingham NG7 2BY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Dimensions is a privately owned, independent fostering agency. The fostering agency aims to provide high-quality fostering placements that are safe, nurturing, diverse and supportive family environments.

At the time of inspection, the agency has nine fostering households who care for 10 children. The agency employs one supervising social worker and one family support worker. An experienced registered manager and registered individual are in post.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 August 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: 13 August 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 are positive about the quality of care being provided. Most children live in the same area that they grew up in. This is something that children said was important to them. Foster carers value the support that they receive from the fostering agency. They are passionate about their role and in wanting good outcomes for children.

Foster carers are supportive of children's education and the agency keeps a record of each child's academic progress. Children begin to form a clear understanding of what they want from life, and they have ambitions for the future. For example, one child is working towards becoming a professional footballer. These ambitions are supported by giving children opportunities to attend regular extra-curricular activities.

Foster carers keep records of children's health appointments and update the agency with any health concerns. Children understand the importance of healthy eating and staying fit. All children do some form of fitness.

The fostering agency has devised an independence toolkit for children. Children do engage with this toolkit and complete tasks to enhance their independence skills. Children are encouraged to keep their bedrooms tidy, to do age-related chores and manage their pocket money. Where appropriate, children are given freedom to spend time with their friends in the community.

Children spend time with the family support worker on a regular basis. These activities are child-led and based on their interests. The family support worker has used this opportunity to facilitate friendships. For example, two children who initially met at this support session have become friends, and have visited each other's houses. All children are invited to attend rollerblading on a weekly basis. This activity is popular among all the children.

Children who are no longer cared for by the agency are still invited to children's outings. Some young people, who are living independently and have tight finances, also attend. The fostering agency ensures that money does not become a barrier to children and young people attending. This has created a strong network of support for children and young people.

Although the family support worker is meeting children regularly, records of these meetings are not yet completed in a way that is purposeful or meaningful for children. Furthermore, it is not yet clear from recordings when the supervising social worker has spent time with a child as part of a supervision visit.

Where a child speaks a different language to that of their carers, or practises different cultural traditions, it is not clear at the point of placement what a foster

carer is being asked to do to meet the child's needs. For one child, there has been drift in the foster carer meeting their identity needs.

This same child was unable to meet their respite carers ahead of their stay and respite paperwork was not shared with the respite carers in line with agency policy. The registered manager recognises this as an area for development and plans to take effective action.

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

The agency is committed to providing good-quality care and staff work hard to keep children safe. There was a good example of staff listening to children when they raised concerns about their care. The agency appropriately escalated concerns with the local authority and advocated on behalf of the children. The local authority described the support offered by the agency as invaluable. Wider professionals describe the manager's response to safeguarding as strong.

Children have a good understanding of the risks associated with peer pressure and they can articulate how they stay away from negative influences. Children understand that their foster carers sometimes need to check their phones and check on their whereabouts to keep them safe.

Overall, children are involved in few behavioural incidents. However, when incidents do happen for children, staff are responsive and take effective action to reduce risk and put support in place. When relationships within the foster family become strained, the family support worker will spend time with children and their foster carers to plan a way forward. This tailored support helps to reduce risk and promotes placement stability for children. No children have experienced an unplanned ending to their placement.

Although household safer-care plans are in place, these documents are not updated when a new child joins the foster family. This is necessary to ensure that each child understands what plans are in place to keep them safe in their home. Furthermore, it is unclear what foster carers are being asked to do to ensure that each child's care and safety needs are being met, because none of the children have an individualised safe care plan.

One child is allowed a lock on their bedroom door. However, there is no risk assessment in place for this. This is necessary to protect children from hazards such as fire.

The manager follows processes to ensure that staff are recruited safely, but there are still weaknesses in recruitment practice. For example, there needs to be more professional curiosity when reviewing applicants' references. There also needs to be greater scrutiny over employment chronologies. Therefore, the corresponding recommendation remains in place from the last inspection.

The agency has improved its recording and response to complaints. Therefore, this requirement has been met.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The service is well led, with suitably qualified and experienced leaders and managers. Staff are positive about the team and state that managers are approachable and knowledgeable. Staff are regularly supervised, and training is made available. Team meetings take place regularly and are well attended.

Foster carers are positive about the assessment process. One foster carer stated that the agency 'took a chance on them' when other fostering agencies did not recognise their potential. Assessments are detailed and are completed within timescales. Although checks are completed to a good standard, chronologies for foster carers could be more detailed.

Foster carers have a good working relationship with every person within the organisation. For example, foster carers state that 'they can pick up the phone to anyone', and that 'everyone knows their children well'. For this reason, most new foster carers come through as a referral from an existing foster carer. Recruitment has remained steady throughout the pandemic.

Foster carers have a good training record and understand why training is relevant as part of their role. Foster carers are regularly supervised and receive telephone calls and visits from both their supervising social worker and the family support worker. Support groups are provided online but are well attended.

Although there is a full staff team in place, there has been a pattern of supervising social workers only working for the agency for short periods of time. This lack of consistency does have a negative impact on foster carers and children. However, the impact of this has been lessened because the manager has remained present and accessible to foster carers and children throughout. Similarly, the family support worker has been in post for over a year. Despite staff turnover, foster carers are positive about the agency and state that they are well supported.

Fostering panels meet on a regular basis and the central list is well balanced in terms of experience and diversity. Panel minutes are accurate and clearly evidence discussions held. Paperwork is sent to panel in good time.

However, the panel is newly established with most members having been recruited within the last year. Panel member appraisals are not yet reflective, and they are out of timescales. The panel chair does not yet complete an annual report. The agency decision-maker is suitably qualified but is new to role. The agency recognises that there are some areas of development for panel. The agency is taking steps to address this.

The fostering agency makes savings for children as soon as they join a foster family. The responsible individual takes accountability for these funds and ensures that these are transferred appropriately when a child leaves.

The quality of care is now being reviewed by the manager and reports have been submitted to Ofsted. Therefore, this previous requirement is met.

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. Where staff have spent time with children this is not yet well recorded. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.7)
- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. Household safer-care plans are not yet updated in line with a new child joining the fostering family. Children do not yet have individualised safe care plans. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9). The agency should evidence what steps will be taken to ensure that each child's needs can be met at point of placement. This includes respite placements. Wherever possible, children should be given the opportunity to meet their respite carers before staying with them. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in staff and panel member recruitment. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 19.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the assessment and appraisal of all staff involved in fostering work takes account of identified skills needed for particular roles and is used to identify individuals' learning and development needs. Panel member should be regularly appraised. The panel chair does not yet complete an annual panel chair report. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 23.5)

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: SC438506

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Inspector

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

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