

First for Fostering Ltd

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181 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington DL3 8DE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

First for Fostering is an independent fostering agency, which registered in May 2021. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children. The agency provides long-term and short-term care, parent and baby placements, emergency placements, and respite placements for children with a range of needs. Placements are provided by recruited foster carers.

The agency currently has three fostering households who provide care for four children.

This is a small agency comprising of three directors, the responsible individual, the registered manager and one supervising social worker. A second supervising social worker commenced employment during the inspection.

The manager was registered with Ofsted on 18 August 2022.

Inspection dates: 21 to 25 November 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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers, who are committed to them, know them well, and have a clear understanding of their needs. Children are enabled to develop a sense of belonging and are included into their foster family's lives.

Prospective foster carers feel welcomed by the agency. There is a clear process in place for assessments, which are undertaken in a timely way. Assessments are good quality, and strengths and vulnerabilities are appropriately explored and evaluated. One foster carer said:

'I'm so pleased I came here. They deliver on what they say they do. I feel valued and don't feel silly asking questions. The values that this agency have are right for me.'

Effective matching of children with their foster carers leads to stability for children. The matching process is informed by the agency having a clear understanding of children's needs. These are then matched with foster carers with the knowledge and skills necessary to help and support the child. This includes collaborative working with the child's social worker to ensure that all the information about the child is shared with the foster carer before any decision is made about the placement. This process allows the foster carers to have a full and balanced picture of the child's needs when deciding whether they can meet their needs.

Children who are new in placement are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. This includes visits and overnight stays. In advance of any introductions, children are provided with a welcome booklet from their prospective foster carers. This contains a profile of the foster carers and the things they enjoy. Children are also given a 'Hello Box' from the agency, which contains small items to welcome the child. The box then doubles as a memory box for foster carers to place mementos in during the child's placement. This prepares children well and supports them to settle in quicker.

Foster carers feel valued and listened to. Foster carers say that they are never without support from the agency, and due to the agency being small, they benefit from having personalised support and advice available day and night. The support that foster carers receive from their supervising social worker helps to deliver good-quality and individualised care and support to children. This support enhances the children's experiences on a day-to-day basis. One foster carer said:

'What I love the most is they [agency staff] are so approachable. Nothing is too much trouble and I never feel silly asking for a reminder or a recap on anything if necessary. I am glad I went with my gut feeling about them initially and didn't go ahead with the larger company that I spoke to first.'

Effective professional relationships between foster carers, children's social workers and other key individuals support foster carers to provide good-quality care to the children. When issues arise, support is readily available, which aids placement stability. In some instances, this has helped to mitigate risks to children.

Children make good progress from their starting points. However, the systems used to track children's progress do not provide sufficient evaluation to capture this in detail. This is not helpful for children to see how they make progress in line with their set targets.

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

There is a strong and proactive safeguarding culture across the agency as both staff and foster carers understand their safeguarding responsibilities. As such, safeguarding procedures are consistently followed. This promotes the children's safety and welfare.

Carers provide children with a clear message that their safety and well-being are a high priority to them. There have been no complaints and no allegations made against carers.

Safer recruitment processes are followed when carers are being assessed. This provides assurance that they are suitably vetted to provide care to children.

There is a clear monitoring and reviewing system in place, which ensures the ongoing safety and well-being of children. This includes a regular review of the carers' health and safety checks, such as Disclosure and Barring Service checks and medical checks. Unannounced home visits take place at least twice-yearly, providing the children with regular opportunities to express their views without their carers being present.

Children's risk assessments and safer care policies are rigorous. When new risks emerge, these documents are updated and include clear strategies to mitigate the risks reoccurring.

When children do go missing, which is infrequent, the agency's missing-from-home policies are not followed. The agency does not have a suitable missing-from-home log as identified in their policy and procedures, and suitable records are not being kept. There is no clear system in place for return-home interviews to be undertaken. This potentially places children at risk.

Serious incidents are notified appropriately to Ofsted. However, on one occasion, there was a significant delay in the regulator receiving a notification. This means that Ofsted are unable to evaluate the agency's response in a timely way in relation to safeguarding incidents and be assured that the agency has responded appropriately.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for the service. There is a culture across the service of high expectations and quality practice, with a continual focus on children.

The registered manager is realistic and honest about the shortfalls within the agency as well as her own lack of management experience. She is passionate about her role and the outcomes for children.

All mandatory training is completed by foster carers, who are clear about the expectations of them with regards to their training standards. The agency is proactive at encouraging foster carers to join support groups and access training to help them meet the specific needs of children in their care. Support groups provide foster carers with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills as well as an opportunity for peer support.

Feedback from foster carers is that they find the quality of supervision to be good and that they value the opportunity to reflect on their practice.

Panel is well attended and there is a good mix of experience and diversity among the panel members. Panel minutes provide a clear appraisal of panel business. The quality of assessments that are considered by panel are good. The panel chair described how there is a positive culture within the agency and openness to learn and improve on practice.

Staff receive regular supervision that is focused on children's experiences, their plans and feedback from children, carers and professionals. Supervision is recorded appropriately. Team development days also take place, which focus on developing the service and driving performance.

A shortfall was identified in the management oversight on the case files. Some records do not include a manager's evaluation and signature, so it is not clear whether the registered manager has seen and signed off the documents. There is also no evidence that the manager has reviewed and evaluated the quality of any records. This is a missed opportunity to review the quality of the staff's practice to ensure that it meets the needs of foster carers and children.

The quality of records is generally good. However, some recording inaccuracies have been identified. This means that the staff do not have the correct information when providing support to foster carers.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered persons must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered persons must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a policy, which is agreed with the local police, setting out–</p> <p>the measures to be followed to prevent children placed with foster parents from going missing from their placement, and</p> <p>the procedure to be followed when a child is missing from a foster parent’s home without permission. (Regulation 13 (3)(a)(b))</p>	25 January 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that they regularly monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service’s policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that information and entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are accurate, legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that information about a child is recorded clearly and in a way that will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. In particular, ensure that when tracking children’s progress, there is a clear evaluation of the progress that children make from their starting points. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 29.1)

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: 2618526

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Registered provider address: 181 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington, Co Durham DL3 8DE

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Inspectors

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector

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