

Amber Fostering

Amber Fostering Ltd

Suite 310, Olympic House, 28-42 Clements Road, Ilford IG1 1BA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned, independent fostering agency based in London. The majority of its foster carers are based in Luton. One fostering household is based in Birmingham. The agency provides foster care placements for short- and long-term respite, foster care placements for asylum-seeking children, unaccompanied minors, children with complex health needs, sibling groups and parents with children.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had four approved fostering households and five children placed with its foster carers. The independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted in April 2020. The fostering service's registered manager left the service in August 2022. The provider is yet to appoint a new manager.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 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: 7 June 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make steady progress from their original starting points. Their overall experiences are positive, and they develop strong attachments to their foster families. Children feel loved and listened to and have not made any complaints.

Children receive personalised care that meets their needs and is in accordance with their care plans. They live in stable environments and enjoy sound relationships with their foster families. Children benefit from careful placement planning. The fostering service's revised matching process is effective. Introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are well coordinated. This was not the case at the last inspection. Children settle quickly in their new homes, and unplanned endings do not happen.

Children receive care that meets their identity needs. This is particularly the case for issues of culture, ethnicity, language and religion. However, the current pool of foster carers is very small, and the group is not ethnically diverse. This does not demonstrate that the fostering agency can, in the future, meet children's diverse needs.

Children's learning outcomes are positive. They attend school and college regularly, and most are making steady progress. Staff and foster carers consistently liaise with education professionals to promote children's learning. Older children receive support to develop practical living skills. This helps to prepare them for adulthood.

Children live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of children's physical, emotional and social well-being. Children have good access to primary healthcare services, and they receive advice and support from specialist services as required. This is particularly the case for children with complex medical needs. Staff and foster carers' communication with healthcare professionals is consistent. This ensures compliance with medical treatment plans, which in turn promotes children's healthy lifestyles.

Children spend time with their brothers and sisters, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for family time carefully. Where children do not wish to meet with family members, their wishes are respected.

Children have fun and engage in a wide range of physical, social and religious activities of their choosing. Typically, these include attending youth clubs, Scouts and enjoying trips to the seaside and amusement parks. Children also enjoy participating in holidays, other family events and celebrations with their foster families.

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

Children say they feel safe with their foster families, who work hard to protect them from harm and abuse. Children benefit from the agency's clear and robust child protection policies and procedures, which staff and foster carers follow. This helps to keep children safe.

Staff ensure that comprehensive placement plans address children's changing needs and that strategies are in place that help to reduce risks. Staff complete individualised risk assessments soon after placements start. These are regularly updated and help to identify known and potential risks to children's safety. Foster carers devise safe care policies. This ensures that children receive safe care in their households.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection. This supports foster carers' safe care of children. Staff conduct at least one unannounced visit to each fostering household every year. During these visits, children are seen and spoken with in private. This is another mechanism to monitor the safety of children.

Children are not involved in safeguarding issues such as substance misuse, missing from care, self-harming behaviour, and child sexual and criminal exploitation. Staff ensure that they explore child protection issues with foster carers in supervision sessions and in other foster carer forums. This helps to promote children's safety.

Foster carers encourage children's positive behaviour. This is largely achieved through praise and the use of incentives. Foster carers receive training in de-escalation techniques. This helps them to manage children's sometimes challenging and dangerous behaviour. Foster carers also receive training in the use of restraint. For one child, restraint features as an agreed safeguarding measure. This is only used as a last resort to prevent serious harm to the child and others.

Since the last inspection, there has been one allegation made by children against their foster carers. Staff managed the incident appropriately and in accordance with child protection procedures. Staff's communication with key safeguarding professionals was effective. Staff took action to ensure that appropriate support was available to the children.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnerships with other agencies. These include children's social workers, and health and school personnel. This collaboration promotes an effective, coordinated approach to safeguarding children.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. They provide children with a comfortable and nurturing environment.

The fostering service has good systems in place to ensure that the vetting, selection and recruitment of staff and panel members are thorough. This confirms that staff and others are suitable to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The fostering service's previous registered manager resigned from the service earlier this year. The fostering service is yet to appoint a manager. During this interim, the agency's director is largely responsible for the day-to-day running of the service and its overview. Leaders and managers accept that this is not an appropriate long-term arrangement, and they are in the process of recruiting a new manager.

Stakeholders inside and outside of the fostering service identify managers as being visible and approachable to offer support and advice. This is the view of staff and foster carers. A foster carer said, 'It's a small team compared to others. Everyone knows everyone. It's like a family. Support is available and staff are easy to reach.' Staff are equally complimentary about the support they receive from managers. A staff member said, 'Support and supervision has been good. Supervision is regular and meaningful; it meets my needs and children's needs.'

The fostering service's preparation, support and training of foster carers are effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of those they look after. Foster carers are skilled in meeting children's identified needs. They receive a good range of training that helps them to provide safe, personalised care to children.

The support of foster carers is very good. Foster carers say that the support that they receive from the staff team is excellent. Staff complete regular supervisory visits that review placement issues. Foster carers feel valued and appreciated by the agency and talk of the organisation operating 'like a family'.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and efficiently. The fostering panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective. Membership of the fostering panel includes expertise in key areas of children's development.

The quality of foster carer assessments is good. These assessments are detailed, analytical and highlight how applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers. The fostering agency's foster carer reviewing process is well managed and confirms that foster carers remain suitable to care for children.

Case records are clear and appropriately detailed. However, the agency's current recording and database system is not yet fully developed. For example, the system does not readily provide staff with access to historical records. This does not ensure that staff have full information relating to children's past placement experiences.

Stakeholders and interested parties have access to comprehensive information about the fostering service. The agency's statement of purpose is an informative document

that outlines well the services and facilities it aims to provide. The service produces two children's guides for the use of children. Both are user-friendly and easy to read.

Foster carers, staff and managers work in close partnership with other professionals. A local authority social worker said of her communication with a foster carer, 'It's excellent. The carer communicates with me over the phone, by text and emails. She is accessible and also available for home visits at short notice. Since being placed, [name of child] has made significant progress in all areas of her development, and the placement is exceeding expectation.'

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 provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency.</p> <p>Where the registered provider is—</p> <p>an organisation, it must not appoint the person who is the responsible individual as the manager,</p> <p>a partnership, it must not appoint any of the partners as the manager.</p> <p>The registered provider must notify the Chief Inspector without delay of—</p> <p>the name of any person appointed in accordance with this regulation, and</p> <p>the date on which the appointment is to take effect. (Regulation 6 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b))</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that the fostering service's recording and database system is updated to include archived information.</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>

Recommendation

- The registered person should implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers are responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.1)

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: 2559288

Registered provider: Amber Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Suite 310, Olympic House, 28-42 Clements Road, Ilford IG1 1BA

Responsible individual: William Neilson

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Nhlanganiso Nyathi, His Majesty's Inspector

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