

Fortitude Fostering

Fortitude Fostering Community Interest Company

112 Innovation Hub, Roffey Park, Forest Road, Horsham RH12 4TB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is a newly registered community interest company, based in Horsham. The service offers short-term and long-term foster care placements and placements for parent and child. At the time of the inspection there were nine fostering households, looking after 14 children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 23 August 2021.

Inspection dates: 28 November to 2 December 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Serious and widespread failures by senior managers have left foster carers and children with inconsistent support and care from the agency. Following this inspection, a suspension notice was served on the agency.

Ofsted has significant concerns regarding the conduct of the registered manager and the responsible individual, both of whom are directors of the organisation. There is an ongoing investigation in relation to the validity of documents and accuracy of records, including safer care plans and risk assessments. This has potentially put children at risk of harm.

Senior managers have failed to address poor recording and poor performance in a timely way. This has undermined the level of service offered to children, foster carers and placing authorities.

A supervising social worker failed to demonstrate how the dynamics of the relationship between a birth child and a foster child had been managed. The difficulties between the children had been recorded in supervision records. However, further exploration of the potential impact on the children's experiences and any guidance offered to the foster carers was not evidenced or subject to review. The breakdown of the relationship was cited as one of the factors that led to the foster child moving from the home. This failure was not identified during senior managers' monitoring and auditing processes.

Senior managers did not respond adequately to a concern raised by a child. The concern was not responded to as a formal complaint. This was a missed opportunity to ensure that the child felt heard. This does not encourage children to express their views and feelings.

There was a significant delay in accessing medical services for a child. This is an example of a child's health needs not being prioritised.

The agency has not recruited foster carers to provide short breaks, which are agreed as part of foster carers' support packages. This has had a significant impact on the morale of some foster carers. Some carers have said they feel supported by the agency and were positive about their experience. However, other foster carers expressed dissatisfaction and significant concerns.

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

Concerns relating to the conduct of managers have been raised directly with Ofsted and further concerns were identified during this full inspection. A number of allegations have been referred to safeguarding professionals. These allegations are subject to investigation. There are serious implications for the care being given to

children and the quality of the oversight and support for the foster carers who care for them.

Senior managers failed to ensure that external professionals were aware of significant events. An allegation by a child was not reported to senior managers, in line with policy and procedures. This led to a delay in reporting this allegation to the local authority designated officer (LADO). Senior managers failed to implement the LADO's recommendations in a timely manner. In addition, Ofsted was not notified of the allegation, in line with regulation. This demonstrates a failure to implement statutory safeguarding practices. It also prevents the regulator from having the necessary oversight of the agency.

There are concerns regarding the authenticity of records, such as children's safer care plans and details of visits and risk assessments. This leaves children at potential risk of harm, due to foster carers not having accurate care plans to refer to and to support them in looking after children safely.

The guidance for foster carers to safely manage risks if a child goes missing from care were also inadequate. This puts children at further risk.

Essential safeguarding checks for an adult in a fostering household were not carried out before approval of a foster carer's transfer into the agency. The registered manager failed to provide evidence that this was adequately addressed in a risk assessment.

There has been a high turnover of staff. There are insufficient numbers of staff to operate the agency in line with fostering regulations. There is currently one supervising social worker, who is new to the agency and works part time. The only other employed staff are the registered manager and responsible individual. The lack of staff greatly reduces support for foster carers and the children that they care for. This compromises the safety of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The responsible individual has failed to take appropriate action when complaints have been made about the honesty and integrity of the registered manager. This allegation is under investigation. For example, the responsible individual failed to take appropriate action when the registered manager was alleged to have falsified records on two occasions. Following this, the registered manager gave notice of his intention to resign from their role on 31 March 2023, but no interim safeguards were implemented by the responsible individual. These failures to take action leave children at potential risk of harm.

Following the inspection, Ofsted was provided with assurances about the actions that would be taken regarding the registered manager in advance of the investigation outcome. However, the plan changed, meaning that the assurances given to Ofsted no longer applied. This response did not demonstrate an understanding of the

significant implications of the concerns identified at the inspection or their impact on safe care practices. This leaves children and their foster carers vulnerable.

The independence of panel members has been compromised by conflicts of interest. The registered manager acted as panel adviser, despite him being a director of the organisation and in a management role and having given notice due to his conduct. In addition, another panel member remained on the panel unchallenged until the previous panel adviser raised concerns about the conflict of interest.

The agency has not demonstrated an adequate assessment of potential carers. There is a lack of consistent professional curiosity. Some issues, such as reasons for not pursuing partner references, are not clearly recorded. In addition, risks identified in a prospective foster carer's health information were not explored. The lack of professional curiosity was raised by the panel chair. Senior managers recognised this failing and have plans to provide additional training to address this.

Complaints from carers have not been responded to in line with the agency's complaints policy. There is also a failure to provide carers with a formal response and outcome to their concerns.

The senior managers' quality assurance tools are not sufficiently robust and fail to identify shortfalls. The monitoring and review systems are not effective.

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>A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so.</p> <p>A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character. (Regulation 7 (1) (2)(a)(b))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>Consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b)(e))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission. (Regulation 13 (3))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular the fostering service provider must ensure that each child—</p> <p>is a registered patient with a general medical practitioner who provides primary medical services under Part 4 of the National Health Service Act 2006,</p>	26 February 2023

<p>has access to such medical, dental, nursing, psychological and psychiatric advice, treatment and other services as the child may require. (Regulation 15 (1) (2)(a)(b))</p>	
<p>Subject to paragraph (7), the registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must establish a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>children are enabled to make a complaint or representation. (Regulation 18 (1) (5)(a))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience.</p> <p>For the purposes of this regulation and regulation 24—</p> <p>a person is not independent of the fostering service provider if—</p> <p>in the case of a fostering agency, the person is employed by, or is a trustee of, that fostering agency. (Regulation 23 (1) (10)(a)(iii))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance</p>	26 February 2023

as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable. (Regulation 25 (3))	
<p>The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent ("X"), and any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>The fostering service provider—</p> <p>must obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family, and any other information they consider relevant. (Regulation 26 (1) (2)(a))</p>	26 February 2023
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.</p> <p>Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))</p>	26 February 2023

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: 2618702

Registered provider: Fortitude Fostering Community Interest Company

Registered provider address: 112 Innovation Hub, Roffey Park, Forest Road,
Horsham RH12 4TB

Responsible individual: Oluremi Johnson

Registered manager: Benjamin Bennett

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Inspector

Suzy Lemmy, Social Care Inspector

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