

Illuminance Fostering Service Limited

100 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes MK9 1FH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Illuminance Fostering is an independent fostering agency based in Milton Keynes. The agency registered with Ofsted in February 2022 and offers same-day, short-term, bridging placements and parent and child placements. The approved foster carers live in local authorities including Essex, London and Cumbria. At the time of this inspection, 14 fostering households were looking after nine children.

The manager registered in February 2022.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 January 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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	requires improvement to be good
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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: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This newly registered agency approved its first fostering household in June 2022. At the time of this inspection, the agency has looked after 36 children in total.

Many children are referred by their local authority as a solution to emergency situations. Most children live with their foster carers for weeks and then return to live with their families, or move to other services. Local authority commissioners and social workers say that the manager goes above and beyond to find welcoming families for children at short notice.

There are a small number of children who have been living with their foster families for more than a few months. Foster carers have access to bespoke support from a therapist and this helps the foster carers meet the children's emotional needs. Some children's lives are transformed because they learn and develop new speech and language skills. This means that most of the children who are settled with loving foster families, flourish.

Foster carers are empathetic. They have a good understanding of the reasons why children need foster care. Some children live with foster carers while the local authority assesses the suitability of the child's extended family. This enables brothers and sisters to live together while the local authority works with the agency to find permanent homes.

Many children live with foster carers from the same or similar cultural backgrounds. This helps children to maintain their identity. The manager writes personal letters to each of the children to congratulate them on their individual achievements. This recognition helps to raise children's self-esteem.

The agency and foster carers go above and beyond to ensure that children spend meaningful time with family, as part of the child's plan. The agency employs family support workers. They offer an additional layer of help for children, their families, and the foster carers by supporting children during family time. The family support workers take the children out and spend time getting to know children's individual preferences. This helps children to feel valued, helps to maintain important family links, and ensures children have fun during times of uncertainty.

The agency places importance on children's education and learning. Foster carers and supervising social workers attend education meetings and advocate to make certain that children receive the right support. This means that foster carers ensure children are attending nursery or school. Occasionally, when a child is not in school, the agency supports children to learn at home. The agency engages tutors and ensures that foster carers provide daily experiences that are educational. This ensures that children continue to learn when they are waiting for formal education.

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

Children spoken to say that they feel safe, welcomed into their foster carer's home, and well looked after. The colourful and informative children's guides help to ensure that children of different ages and abilities know how to ask for help when necessary.

There have been few safeguarding incidents. Children rarely go missing from home. Foster carers, supervising social workers and the manager ensure that risk-taking information is appropriately shared with the professional network assigned to each child. This helps to prioritise children's safety.

The agency is in its first year of operation. The required unannounced visits to foster carers have begun. The visit reports sampled show that supervising social workers are thorough. During the visits, the supervising social workers spend time talking to children and checking the suitability of the environment.

Allegations against foster carers result in swift action to keep children safe. Concerns about foster carers' standards of care result in liaison with the local authority designated officer. Investigations result in the foster carers returning to foster panel for review.

Initial assessments of prospective foster carers' suitability are thorough. However, the checks for adult children, particularly those who have returned to live with their parents, are not provided in good time. This does not ensure that all relevant information is available to the foster panel.

The fostering panel is diverse in professional and life experience. The foster panel chair is significantly experienced in fostering. Good feedback helps the panel adviser to improve the quality of assessment reports presented to the fostering panel. The reason for the agency's decision is clearly written and evidences the rationale for, and the terms of, foster-carers' approval.

Household safe care and risk-reduction plans provide some guidance for foster carers. The agency staff complete a matching form to review the potential risks and suitability of each child's placement. However, the form focuses on the agency's aspiration for the foster child. This does not demonstrate how well the agency considers the needs of every child in the household, including the foster carer's own children. This does not demonstrate that the matching process is sufficiently rigorous.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The manager has owned the service since registration. There has been one change in responsible individual. At the time of this inspection, the range of roles fulfilled by the responsible individual conflicted. This is because the responsible individual is the

agency decision-maker, and is involved in case management. This does not ensure that the management arrangements are sufficiently objective and vigorous.

On one occasion, the required exemption for one fostering household to care for more than three unrelated children was not sought. The failure to understand legislation places foster carers at risk of operating as an unregistered children's home and resulted in additional disruption for vulnerable children.

The geographical spread of the approved foster families is wide. On one occasion, a child with a complex social history moved to live with newly approved foster carers. This was a substantial distance away from the agency's registered office and the child's local authority. While no immediate risks are identified, this decision-making increases the likelihood of the foster placement breaking down. This fails to provide a consistent approach to helping foster carers understand and predict every child's needs and behaviours.

The agency offers foster carers access to a broad range of training and online support groups. Foster carers said that the training is excellent and helps them to understand more about childhood trauma. Nonetheless, the training is virtual and professional development plans are not sufficiently focused on the changing needs of individual children. This does not ensure that the plans to support foster carers' development are comprehensive.

Foster carers report high levels of contact and support from their supervising social worker and the manager. Newly appointed supervising social workers benefit from a structured induction, regular supervision, and team meetings. The agency is generously staffed for the number of registered households. Supervising social workers' caseloads are low. The agency is actively recruiting foster carers and has plans to continue to grow.

The manager and responsible individual understand the agency's strengths and priority areas for improvement. They have established a development plan and are working with the quality assurance manager to improve management oversight. Managers responded quickly and effectively to shortfalls identified during this inspection.

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 and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the agency decision-maker is not directly involved in case work and the responsible individual has effective oversight of the registered manager role.</p>	28 April 2023
<p>A person may exceed the usual fostering limit if he is exempted from it by the local authority within whose area he lives. (Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 (4)(1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the placement of more than three children in a fostering household has been formally approved.</p>	28 April 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all foster placements. This particularly relates to the arrangements

and timing of checks for adult children and back-up carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.1)

- The registered person should ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. In particular, matching risk assessments should consider the needs of all of the children in the household including the foster carers' own children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 11.2)
- The registered person should ensure that all necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration. In particular, ensure that the results from background checks for foster carers' adult children are available. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.3)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.5)

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: 2654713

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Responsible individual: Gary Jeffrey

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Inspector

Rosie Davie, Social Care Inspector

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