

Foster Care Associates Yorks and Lincs

Foster Care Associates Limited

Europa View, Sheffield Business Park, Sheffield S9 1XH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates Limited is an independent fostering agency. The service operates from a registered office in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. The areas the agency covers include Sheffield, Doncaster, Leeds, Hull, Mansfield and Peterborough. The agency offers a range of foster placements, including permanent, long-term, short-term, and parent and child. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 232 fostering households caring for 332 children.

At the time of the inspection there were also 30 children in staying put arrangements. These are arrangements that enable young people over the age of 18 years to remain living with their foster carers.

The registered manager has been in post since September 2021.

During this inspection, a group of children and foster carers were spoken with.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 January 2023

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: 21 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers, who know them well and have a good understanding of their needs. Children make progress in the agency's high ratio of long-term and permanent placements, where children are enabled to develop a sense of belonging and are embraced into the fostering family.

Careful and considered planning, which often includes tea visits, means that children are welcomed sensitively by their new foster families. Children receive an introductory leaflet and a welcome booklet, which includes the foster carer's profile, before any introductions start. This, and a memory box, helps the child to feel welcomed and informed when they arrive, and provides them with a safe place to store the important items.

In general, the matching of children's needs to the foster carers' skills is done well. A matching matrix and risk assessments ensure that the foster carers have a full and balanced picture of the child's needs, and whether they can meet those needs, before a child is placed. However, some foster carers do not receive all the medical and health information known about the child. The agency recognised this shortfall and has worked with the respective local authorities to address this.

Children say they feel safe living with their fostering families. They feel listened to and are happy that their views are understood and considered in the foster carer reviews. Children are encouraged to join the agency's participation group. As a result, children are engaged positively in the development of the service and speak positively about the mutual respect they have for each other.

Children's health and educational needs are well met. Children's attendance and attainment in education are very positive. When additional help and support are required from the agency, the staff are proactive in responding to the children's needs, to ensure that the children receive the services that they need.

There is a clear, timely process in place for assessing foster carers. Assessments of foster carers are of good quality and their strengths as well as their vulnerabilities are appropriately explored and evaluated. A foster carer referred to the independent assessor as 'amazing'.

Foster carers feel valued and listened to. They say that they are never without support from the agency. The support that they receive from their supervising social worker helps them to deliver good quality and individualised care and support to the children. This enhances the children's day-to-day experiences.

Effective professional relationships exist between the foster carers, social workers and other key individuals. These positive working relationships enable foster carers to provide the children with good-quality care. The emphasis on open and respectful communication between all the adults helps to address any arising issues for the

children in a timely manner. This ongoing and effective support system helps some children who are in crisis to remain living with their fostering families.

Children make good progress from their starting points. However, the systems used to track the children's progress are not well recorded, and they do not consistently capture the progress that is being made. This is not helpful for children when they want to access their records, as they are unable to recognise the areas where they require support and where they have made progress.

Children's cultural and identity needs are met by foster carers who are proactive in increasing their own knowledge and awareness. However, the role that the agency takes to improve the foster carers' knowledge and understanding is less clear. Children's records also do not explicitly identify how the foster carers will be supported to meet the children's cultural needs. Therefore, the agency cannot be assured that the foster carers are consistently meeting the cultural needs of children when English is not their first language.

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

Foster carers' homes are safe and protect children from harm. There is a strong and proactive safeguarding culture across the agency as the staff and foster carers understand their safeguarding responsibilities. This promotes the children's safety and welfare.

Foster carers value the children in their care. They provide children with clear messages that their safety and well-being are a high priority to them. When a child described her foster carer, she said, 'She is a really nice carer, just a comfortable person to speak to and I like being with her. She makes me feel safe and guided.'

When complaints and allegations are made against foster carers, the agency takes these seriously to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Timely referrals and notifications are made to the local authority designated officer and Ofsted. This, and the safer recruitment procedures which are followed when foster carers are being assessed, ensures that only suitable individuals care for children.

When children go missing from care, foster carers and the agency work together to ensure that the agency's missing-from-home policies are followed. A positive and proactive response, which includes foster carers providing key intelligence to the police, helps in the swift return of children to the home. Foster carers are clear about their roles, so accurate records of these events are maintained. These records, and the return home interviews that the agency ensures are offered to children, support the gathering of intelligence and the identification of strategies. This helps to support children to become increasingly safe.

The agency has systems in place to monitor and review how it operates. This supports the ongoing safety and well-being of children. Foster carers' health and safety checks, such as Disclosure and Barring Service checks and medical checks, are regularly reviewed by the agency. Children are seen and spoken with during

regular home visits by the agency's supervising social workers, including at least a yearly unannounced visit. This provides an opportunity for children to express their views in private and to show their environment without their foster carers being directly involved or present.

Children's risk assessments are thorough. When new risks for the children emerge, these documents are updated and include clear strategies for the foster carers to follow. This reduces the risks for children from reoccurring.

Despite the systems in place, one fostering household has been locking an external door to manage a child's behaviour. This restrictive measure of control has not been challenged by the care team. The registered manager and leadership team recognise that this is not appropriate. They have taken steps to ensure the correct safeguarding procedures are followed that include a full assessment of decisions made.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the service. The registered manager is passionate about her role. Her continual focus on listening to the children helps her to continue to improve practice. The creativity and vision for the development of the service have children at the centre of innovation.

The panel is chaired by a knowledgeable and experienced panel chair. The multicultural, mixed-gender panel members have a broad range of experience. Panel minutes provide a clear appraisal of the quality assurance process in place. The quality of the assessments that are considered by the panel is generally good. When shortfalls are identified in the quality of assessments, the panel identify these and raise them appropriately in the minutes.

The management oversight and footprint on some case files are inconsistent. There are very few recordings on the foster carers' supervision records to identify that the fostering service managers have audited and evaluated the quality of these records. This means that the fostering service managers rely on subjective information provided by the supervising social worker and on compliance data, rather than evaluating the quality of the documents themselves.

The feedback from the agency's social workers about the support that the management team provides is overwhelmingly positive. Staff say they receive regular reflective supervision sessions that they find beneficial. However, the management team has failed to ensure that the agency's supervision policy is followed, as the records from these sessions are not consistently documented in the case file. This oversight may prevent the management team from being assured that any agreed actions from the supervision sessions have been completed.

Foster carers report that the quality of their supervision sessions is good and that they value these opportunities to reflect on their practice. Some records of the supervision sessions are of good quality. However, not all of these records

consistently demonstrate how the supervising social worker has assured themselves that the children's wishes and feelings have been explored, and how they have reviewed and evaluated the foster carer's performance. This limits the effectiveness of the supervision process.

The agency is proactive and it encourages the foster carers to join support groups and access training that helps them to meet the needs of the children in their care. Foster carer support groups provide the foster carers with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and to receive and offer peer support.

Foster carers have completed all of the agency's mandatory training and they are clear about the expectations of them with regards to their training standards. Additional training is offered to carers to meet the children's specific individual needs.

The quality of the monthly records that the foster carers complete to demonstrate the children's experiences and progress is not consistently good. While some records are of good quality, others are brief and lack detail. The records that lack description do not provide the children who wish to access these records with the details of their journey in their life-story work.

The agency is committed to supporting the staff's well-being and promoting their development. Staff spoke positively about the agency's constructive approach to individual progression in the company. The staff are encouraged and supported to learn and develop, to progress their careers in the agency. This supportive succession planning ensures that there is stability within the organisation, which benefits the foster carers and children.

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 fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p> <p>no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13 (2)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered manager must ensure that the routine practice of locking the external doors to restrict a child from leaving a home is reviewed and only used when agreed to safeguard a child.</p>	28 February 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that each foster carer is aware of the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events or health needs, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service should follow up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. These meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs and considering the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. Foster carers' files should include the records of the supervisory meetings as referred to in the provider's policies and procedures. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 21.8)

- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of supervision. Supervision should be held regularly and be reflective as agreed in the provider's supervision policy. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 24.5)
- 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 and distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the carers' logs are detailed, evaluative and are a fair representation of children's day-to-day events. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which 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)

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: SC038256

Registered provider: Foster Care Associates Limited

Registered provider address: Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road,
Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

Responsible individual: John Platt

Registered manager: Melanie Murphy

Telephone number: 0114 2615750

Email address: john.platt@polariscommunity.co.uk

Inspectors

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

Paula Shepherd, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023