

Fostering Together - for children with disabilities

Fostering Together Ltd

The Cobalt Building, 1600 Lower Pemberton, Ashford, Kent TN25 4BF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency has been registered with Ofsted since August 2020.

The agency offers short- and long-term fostering for children with disabilities and complex, life-limiting medical needs.

There are currently nine fostering households with 14 children placed with foster carers.

A suitable registered manager is in post.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 February 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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 July 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

The foster carers meet children's physical, social and emotional needs. The senior management team, staff and support workers work together with the foster carers. This ensures that the children make significant progress and can meet their full potential.

Senior managers and the staff celebrate children's achievements by awarding certificates, which are displayed in the children's homes alongside certificates that are made into fridge magnets. The children are given comfort blankets that have their 'star' achievement badges sewn on. This provides the children with a tangible memory of how well they are doing. The personalised recognition of children's achievements is a strength of the agency.

The children are well prepared for moving into the foster home. An informative children's guide, which is appropriate for their different abilities, helps children to know what to expect. The carer's profile is a useful tool for professionals to use to match the children with the right foster family. As a result, unplanned endings do not often occur.

Senior managers ensure that all foster carers and support workers are trained to meet the children's physical and medical needs before they are placed or have short breaks stays. In addition, a suitably experienced and qualified person audits medication processes. This means that foster carers are supported to manage complex medical needs safely.

The foster carers help children to access a range of activities in the community. Many children enjoyed an inclusive music festival, for which the agency is a partner. In addition, staff organise regular social events that are well attended.

Listening to children's wishes and feelings is a priority for the managers and staff, who have developed diverse ways to capture their views. All staff and foster carers have been trained in an augmentative and alternative communication methods to increase their skills in communicating with children.

The staff and foster carers help children to understand their particular diagnosis or medical condition. They encourage children to celebrate and follow their cultures.

The children are able to add their views to the database, email the manager directly and see their progress. The children's council has started since the last inspection, and this has increased the confidence and self-esteem of the children who participate. One child said about his foster carers, 'The life I have with them is the greatest.'

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

Senior managers, staff and foster carers prioritise the safety of the children. All staff, foster carers and support workers are trained together to ensure that they are aware of any risks and how to prevent harm to children.

The children who access games on the internet are supervised, and safety measures are in place to protect them. Online safety courses are mandatory for the staff and foster carers.

Children are safeguarded by knowledgeable and experienced foster carers who demonstrate love, care and concern for the children. The support packages provided are flexible and increased in times of crisis in response to the children's and foster carers' needs.

A monitoring system has been implemented to ensure that supervising social workers see children on their own and have meaningful communication with them. This gives children the opportunity to share any concerns with somebody outside of the home. Supervising social workers get to know children well so they can observe any changes in a child's presentation that may cause concern.

The staff ensure that children have the right equipment in place, such as hoists or adaptations to their properties, to safely care for the children's physical needs.

Supervising social workers review and update risk assessments and safe care plans to reflect any changes in circumstances or increase in risk. However, a carer's safe care plan wasn't updated when a new child moved into the home. Additionally, a child's safer care plan was not updated in line with the agency's policy following a change in the child's risk assessment. There was no risk to children as a result; however, this was not picked up during monitoring processes.

An independent reviewing officer completes all foster care reviews to a good standard. She meets with all the children to gain their views, helped by the child's support worker or the augmentative and alternative communication specialist in the agency. This provides an added level of protection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Senior managers are passionate and child-centred. They are ambitious and motivated to develop the service and provide a high standard of care. All the staff and foster carers work as a team to achieve the ethos and aims of the agency.

There is a comprehensive recruitment, training and induction programme for new foster carers. Training provided to prospective carers is highly valued and helps new foster carers to be prepared for the role.

Senior managers ensure that the staff and foster carers can access additional training to meet the children's needs and develop their own expertise. All the staff

and foster carers are assessed to identify their learning styles, which are shared with training facilitators.

All the foster carers' feedback is very positive about the professionalism, child-focused and family feel of the agency. Senior managers and staff offer consistent assistance to the foster carers. The use of support workers to provide an additional, flexible resource is instrumental in the agency's success. The personal touch is appreciated by all carers. For example, senior managers organised a fishing trip for a carer who had experienced a particularly complex and difficult situation.

Managers ensure that foster carers are provided with the skills and knowledge that they need. Supervising social workers facilitate regular meetings with foster carers, providing group training as well as an opportunity to reflect together on their practice and achievements.

Professional relationships are very positive. Social workers were very positive about the foster carers' care of their children. One social worker said, 'The placement suits all of [name of child]'s needs and this is assisted by having carers who are very aware of and attuned to her needs.'

Some staff, including the registered manager, have more than one role within the organisation; however, the impact of these roles has not been fully considered. There is a risk that accountability is not clear and the impact on foster carers is not fully considered.

The manager undertakes appropriate and thorough learning reviews when a placement ends and identifies actions to develop the service. However, the ending of a placement that he had oversight of in his role as supervising social worker was also reviewed by him. This does not provide independent reflection and analysis.

Staff supervisions are of a good standard and help staff to reflect on practice and the emotional impact of their specific roles. However, the responsible individual's and registered manager's supervisions are not held monthly in accordance with the agency's supervision policy.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff have access to support, advice and constructive challenge and are provided with regular supervision, in line with the agency's supervision policy, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.4)
- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)
- The registered person should ensure that managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers have clear roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, should be clearly defined. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.4)

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: 2574877

Registered provider: Fostering Together Ltd

Registered provider address: The Cobalt Building, 1600 Lower Pemberton,
Ashford, Kent TN25 4BF

Responsible individual: Matthew Foulkes

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Inspector

Suzy Lemmy, Social Care Inspector

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