

# Achieving for Children

Achieving for Children Community Interest Company

Achieving for Children, Guildhall 2, High Street, Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 1EU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Achieving for Children is a community interest company created in 2014 by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, to provide their children's services. The agency delivers fostering services to children in these two boroughs as well as for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

The fostering agency provides the following types of placements: short-term, long-term, specialist, respite, emergency and sibling placements. Additionally, the service provides foster care placements for parents and babies and asylum-seeking children. The fostering agency covers a wider range of fostering arrangements than a traditional independent fostering agency, which includes 'connected' or 'family and friends' carers.

The fostering service registered with Ofsted in August 2018.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 68 approved households, 10 temporary approved households and a total of 77 children in foster placements.

### Inspection dates: 26 to 30 June 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:** 9 September 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from good-quality individualised care, from foster carers who know them well. Children develop trusting relationships with foster carers, which helps them to settle and feel part of the fostering family. One child has experienced over five placement moves and said confidently that the current foster family 'was the best one'.

Children's social workers, foster carers and staff within the agency talk positively of the progress children make from their starting points. There is a strong culture of multi-agency working, which ensures that children have access to the right support in promoting their physical, emotional and social well-being.

The fostering agency has worked to revise and refine its matching process. The matching tool is now firmly embedded in practice. Consequently, in planned placements, staff match children with carers who have the necessary skills and experience to meet the needs of children. Unplanned endings of placements are unusual and there is a strong emphasis on achieving stability and permanence for children. Transitions to adoption or permanence with other family members are managed well by the fostering agency.

Children who have a different cultural or religious background to the foster carers they live with have their specific needs met well. One foster carer described how proud they were that their foster child had, in a short period of time, developed a good command of English and was able to communicate their opinions in a child looked after review, without the use of the interpreter who was present.

Most children are engaged in education. Fosters carers and staff communicate effectively with education professionals to ensure that children achieve good outcomes. Children spoken to expressed high aspirations about their future careers, with one child wanting to become a politician, another a midwife, and another to work in a scientific field.

Generally, children said that they are listened to by the adults who care for them. The fostering agency continually reviews the methods used to ascertain the views and opinions of children. The fostering agency supports children to attend the Children in Care Council and they can have their say about the quality of care they receive through the foster carer review and child looked after processes.

In general, the transition for older children to adulthood is good. The fostering service promotes 'staying put' arrangements where this is in the best interests of older children. This means that older children can maintain relationships with foster carers, who can continue to support them through the transition. However, in one case, a young person has remained in the 'staying put' arrangement far longer than planned. The fostering agency has escalated this case. However, the fostering agency did not consider access to independent advocacy services, which could

have progressed the transition plan in a time frame that was appropriate for the young person.

The fostering service provides a small, but successful short-break service for children and their families. The level of care provided to children with complex health and medical needs is excellent. Children benefit from having highly motivated and committed carers who talk passionately about the difference they strive to make to the quality of life of children and their families through short breaks.

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

The fostering agency works to protect children from harm and abuse. Foster carers understand the risks for children and agree safety plans with children's social workers, fostering staff and safeguarding agencies. Children know that they can speak to foster carers if they have any worries or concerns, which contributes to a feeling of safety and security.

When safeguarding incidents occur, managers and staff reflect on the action taken to ensure that strategies to reduce harm to children remain effective. However, leaders and managers have not notified Ofsted of all serious incidents in a timely manner.

Safer caring policies are child-specific, with clear strategies for ensuring safety in the foster home as well as when children are away from the foster placement. When concerns for children's safety arise, multi-agency professional meetings take place to address concerns and agree appropriate action. Consequently, incidents reported of children going missing from foster placements and incidents within the home are low. However, the fostering agency's safeguarding policy does not reflect accurately the response to risks such as child criminal exploitation, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Children rarely complain about the care they receive from foster carers and allegations against foster carers are also rare. When there are concerns regarding foster carers' conduct, the fostering service responds promptly to safeguard children. Investigations seek to ensure that children continue to remain safe while quickly establishing the facts so that foster carers are not subject to an unnecessary and stressful standards of care process. The fostering agency consults appropriately with the local authority designated officer, which provides an additional level of safeguarding assurance.

Foster carers and staff receive regular training on safeguarding and child protection. Prospective foster carers' induction ensures that they understand their responsibilities in keeping children safe. Fostering assessments have a strong safeguarding focus.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. The fostering agency undertakes two unannounced visits to foster homes in a year, as well as completing annual health

and safety checks. These measures, alongside regular supervision visits, ensure that effective monitoring of the safety of foster carers' homes take place.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders and managers are experienced and knowledgeable in the areas of child placement, permanence and children in care. Leaders and managers have clear aspirations for exceeding the objectives of the statement of purpose and achieving excellence for the fostering agency.

The fostering agency was previously two separate local authority fostering agencies before registration. Leaders and managers are still linked to local authority services for children, such as the virtual school and health and specialist services, and childcare management systems and processes have remained the same. Consequently, leaders and managers advocate for services for children, in most cases, more effectively than a traditional independent fostering agency. Local authority social workers speak highly of the fostering agency and its contribution to good outcomes for children.

The fostering agency staff describe leaders and managers as providing stability after a period of management changes. Staff feel supported and listened to by leaders and managers. Fostering staff receive regular supervision and peer support sessions to help them in their role. Staff are aware that leaders and managers are working to recruit more staff to the team and are committed to improving the service provided to children, despite the constraints of staffing and resources.

Approved foster carers and short-break carers overwhelmingly said that they feel supported by the fostering agency. In particular, foster carers referred to the positive relationships they have with their fostering social workers, which, for some foster carers, have been developed over several years. Leaders and managers work to include foster carers in service improvement and keep carers aware of developments. Leaders and managers acknowledge that better communication with foster carers, in addition to newsletters and carers' forums, is needed. In addition, some foster carers reported that they could not access respite when it was requested.

Foster carers and fostering staff have access to a wide range of online and face-to-face training. The fostering agency operates a three-tier financial incentive scheme, enabling foster carers to progress through the levels after completing certain learning and development objectives and having gained relevant experience. However, not all foster carers have completed their basic level training, support and development standards within the specified timescales. In addition, one foster carer struggled to access any training on caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as this specific subject was not available through the training programme.

Prospective carers spoken to felt welcomed by the fostering agency and described fostering staff as 'gentle and relaxed' in their approach to tackling sensitive information during the assessment process. Leaders and managers are working to

increase the pool of foster carers within the agency and have developed a fostering recruitment strategy to address what is a national shortage of fostering households.

Annual reviews of foster carers offer a clear and robust process for the appraisal of carers' performance over the year and a measure of ongoing suitability. The reviewing officer for foster carers is clear regarding their role in ensuring that plans for children in foster care can be achieved. An example of this was in escalating to senior managers the delay in the transition of a young person from a 'staying put' arrangement to supported accommodation.

The fostering agency's fostering panel operates as an effective quality assurance mechanism for the agency, scrutinising assessments of prospective foster carers and continued approval of established foster carers. The panel membership includes very experienced childcare practitioners. The consideration of reports is robust, and the fostering panel challenges the agency where appropriate. Leaders and managers are working to increase the membership and diversity of the central list. There has been no joint training with members of the central list and fostering staff in the last year.

Leaders and managers have developed effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the service on children's outcomes. The sharing of childcare management recording systems with the two local authorities means that information on, for example, education outcomes for children, can be easily obtained. However, during this inspection, shortfalls were identified in the fostering agency's own systems for monitoring compliance with the agency's policies. For example, although not widespread, audits had not identified that key documentation for some foster carers was not available on files.

## 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>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. (Regulation 36 (1) and Schedule 7)</p> <p>This requirement is restated.</p>	1 September 2023

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children have access to independent advice and support, from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. This relates specifically to the provision of advocacy for children with additional needs to ensure that transition plans are implemented effectively. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). This relates specifically to family and friends carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.3)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, including hard-to-reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This relates specifically to training for foster carers in meeting the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed. This relates specifically to ensuring that respite is discussed as a package of support for foster carers at the beginning of placements, with appropriate respite carers being identified early. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering agency's child protection procedures identify how the service will respond to contextual safeguarding

matters. This relates specifically to the responses to safeguarding children at risk of child criminal exploitation, modern day slavery, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.4)

- The registered person should ensure that those on the central list are given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the systems in place to monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the agency's policies are effective and address any issues raised by this monitoring. This relates specifically to auditing of foster carers' files to ensure that health and safety checklists, carer medicals, and decisions by the agency decision-maker are present. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

## **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**

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## **Inspectors**

Colin Bent, Social Care Inspector

Nhlanganiso Nyathi, Social Care Inspector



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