

Illuminance Fostering Service

100 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes MK9 1FH

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Illuminance Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency based in Milton Keynes. It 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 visit, 16 fostering households were looking after 27 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2022.

Inspection date: 12 July 2023

Date of previous inspection: 9 January 2023

This monitoring visit

This announced visit took place following a whistle-blowing concern being notified to Ofsted. The nature of the information provided raised concerns about the safety and welfare of children. This was specifically in relation to the agency's training of foster carers, back-up foster carer arrangements, exemptions and matching.

The visit focused on assessing the requirements raised at the last inspection and sampling recent child protection incidents. Inspectors also reviewed specific lines of enquiry, including a focus on the support provided to foster carers.

The registered manager is the founder and owner of the agency, which continues to grow and evolve. Her commitment to ensuring that children receive child-centred care and are treated with dignity and respect is evident. When poor practice issues are identified in the agency, or by outside agencies, they are dealt with effectively by the registered manager.

Management monitoring ensures that the children's records, including safeguarding information, are kept up to date. This ensures that information can be shared quickly and appropriately to help swift decision-making to protect the children.

Since the last inspection, a new responsible individual and agency decision-maker have been appointed to the agency. This realignment of the senior management structure has allowed a separation of roles, which provides greater accountability and independence. The agency decision-maker is no longer directly involved in casework and the responsible individual has effective oversight of the registered manager.

The registered manager has developed a service improvement plan in response to requirements and recommendations raised by Ofsted at the last inspection. The actions from this report outline the steps that have been taken to improve practice, together with a staged implementation of actions, to ensure that there is sustained development and improvement in agency practice.

There have been two exemptions to the usual fostering limit since the last inspection. These exemptions have been appropriate and name the specific children who the foster carer may foster and set out any conditions which apply to the exemption.

Foster carers receive regular, reflective and child-focused support. Good-quality supervision notes show appropriate support and challenge. Moreover, records of supervision meetings with the foster carers show a focus on development and training.

Foster carers have access to a broad, relevant and accessible training programme.

Many children are referred to the agency by their local authority in an emergency. The agency works well with local authorities to ensure that full information is shared with foster carers before children join their fostering household so that appropriate care can be provided.

Unannounced visits are carried out twice a year by different supervising social workers to provide, 'fresh eyes'. These visits often take place at weekends and before and after school. This ensures that children are seen and adds an extra layer of safeguarding practice.

Foster carers are encouraged to have back-up carers who are close family and friends. Back-up carers are identified in the foster carers' initial suitability assessment and form part of the foster carers' support network. They have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, as do adult children who live in the fostering household. The registered manager has developed a new assessment for back-up carers to ensure that they have the necessary experience and skills. However, this is yet to be embedded in practice.

The fostering agency recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of the children they provide care for. Suitability checks are carried out in

line with regulations. These include identity checks, relationship status and health checks, personal references and other enquiries that are necessary, including DBS checks. Prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children safely and responsibly.

The panel chair has good knowledge and understanding of the function of the panel. The panel chair and vice-chair show a good level of professional curiosity. The agency decision-maker thoroughly reviews panel minutes and recommendations to ensure that people are only approved as foster carers once all checks have been carried out. For example, the agency decision-maker declined to approve a proposed foster carer pending an overseas check. This demonstrates effective oversight of the panel by the agency decision-maker.

A foster carer has installed a camera in their home to provide an extra level of supervision of people entering and leaving the home. However, this did not form part of the child's risk assessment or safer care plan. The lack of transparency and agreement over use of the camera means that there is a lack of clarity and guidance on its use to ensure that the monitoring or surveillance are no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's right to privacy.

The recommendations raised at the last full inspection were not assessed because of the specific focus of this visit. Therefore, these have been restated.

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

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 to understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child in 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. This specifically relates to results from background checks for foster carers' adult children. ('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 that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.5)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers respect the child's privacy in a manner that is consistent with good parenting and ensure that monitoring or surveillance are no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy. In particular, the registered person must ensure that any closed-circuit television (CCTV) system is operated within regulatory guidelines and is subject to regular review and consultation with the children's placing local authority. The regulations and guidance relating to CCTV are covered by the General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018. This legislation is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker need to make an objective approval decision. This specifically relates to ensuring that additional checks have been received by the agency before the written report is submitted to the fostering panel. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.7)

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2654713

Registered provider: Illuminance Fostering Service Limited

Registered provider address: 100 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes MK9 1FH

Responsible individual: David Ansong

Registered manager: Ama Apiah

Inspectors

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

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