

Acorn Care (NE) Ltd

33 Kellaw Road, Yarm Road Business Park, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4YA

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Acorn Care (NE) Ltd is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Darlington. The agency undertakes the assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers who provide a wide range of placements to children and young people. This includes short-term and long-term foster placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 14 approved fostering households providing placements for 24 children and young people, including two 'staying put' arrangements.

There is no registered manager. An interim manager started in post in December 2022.

Inspection date: 21 July 2023

Date of previous inspection: 9 May 2023

This monitoring visit

This fostering agency was judged inadequate at the full inspection, which was undertaken between 9 and 12 May 2023. During this inspection, Ofsted identified significant shortfalls due to ineffective leadership and management arrangements, which contributed to the inadequate judgement. As a result of the shortfalls, a decision was made to issue three compliance notices under regulations 12, 17 and 35. One requirement and one recommendation were also issued.

This monitoring visit was carried out to review the action taken by the provider in response to the compliance notices.

Since the full inspection, there is now a new agency decision-maker. The provider has also employed new fostering staff to undertake the preparation and assessment of new foster carers. The use of an independent visitor will also provide monthly external scrutiny of the operation of the fostering agency.

The provider has implemented new safeguarding processes and procedures. These have been shared with fostering staff. Foster carers and the fostering staff have been provided with guidance about the action they should take if an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child is made. This will make sure that allegations are properly investigated. Therefore, the compliance notice that was issued under regulation 12 has been met.

The majority of the foster carers have completed their mandatory and other relevant training. The remaining foster carers will have completed their training by the beginning of October 2023. This will ensure that foster carers have the necessary skills and information to meet the needs of the children who they are caring for.

Leaders and managers have provided the foster carers with information about what they should do if a child needs to be held to keep them and others safe. There are now monitoring systems in place so that managers can review when foster carers have physically held a child who they are caring for. This will mean that there is management oversight to ensure that any physical intervention is necessary and proportionate. Therefore, the compliance notice that was issued under regulation 17 has been met.

The provider has implemented new monitoring and auditing systems at the home. This will help leaders and managers to have oversight of the care provided for the children living with foster carers. The provider is still to implement reviewing systems to ensure that the children are making progress. Not all the foster carers have all the information about the children living with them. One foster carer was not provided with all the necessary information prior to a child moving in. The compliance notice relating to regulation 35 is therefore reissued.

The recommendation that was raised previously was not reviewed during this visit. For this reason, it has been restated.

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 with the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
|---|----------------|
| *The registered person must maintain a system for— improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(b)) | 8 October 2023 |

*These requirements are subject of a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The fostering service provider should ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children who the service is providing for. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 24.6)

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: SC463071

Registered provider: Acorn Care (NE) Limited

Registered provider address: 33 Kellaw Road, Yarm Road Industrial Estate,
Darlington, County Durham DL1 4YA

Responsible individual: Julie-Ann Foxton

Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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