

Sure Start Fostering Agency

Sure Start Fostering Agency Limited

13 Clements Court, Clements Lane, Ilford IG1 2QY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency provides foster care placements for individual and sibling placements, asylum-seeking children and parents and children. The fostering agency supports emergency, short-term, long-term and respite placements.

The responsible individual and registered manager have held their roles since the agency registered with Ofsted in January 2021.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency had 18 approved fostering households with 22 children in placement.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 November 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: 25 April 2022

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

Children make good progress while living with their foster families. They make secure attachments, feel loved and have positive experiences. A child said, 'The best thing about my auntie? She's caring and the family are nice people. They're good hearted and look after you.'

Children's learning outcomes improve the longer they remain living with their foster families. Children attend school and college and receive excellent support from their foster carers and staff from the fostering agency. Children have high ambitions for themselves and are committed to fully meeting their educational potential. Staff and foster carers celebrate children's achievements.

Children's healthcare needs are well met by the fostering agency, and they live healthy lifestyles. Children attend primary healthcare appointments and foster carers ensure that children have required immunisations. Children also attend specialist healthcare services as needed. Staff and foster carers' communication with healthcare professionals is consistent, which ensures that treatment plans are followed. Foster carers receive training in the administration of children's medication. This was highlighted as an issue at the last inspection. Medication practices are safe, and staff monitor this practice.

Children have good opportunities to share their views of the fostering service and they feel listened to. They are familiar with and speak regularly with fostering agency staff, who check that they are happy with the care that they receive. Children know how to make a complaint, but do not generally do so.

The recent appointment of a participation worker gives children another way to share their views and to help shape the development of the fostering agency. When children's birth families live abroad, staff and foster carers work in partnership with external agencies to ensure that where possible, children are able to maintain contact with them.

Children benefit from the fostering agency's matching process, and their identity needs are well met. The matching process is robust and ensures that foster families can meet children's all-round needs. When there are issues, such as with transport or new school uniforms, staff ensure additional resources are available to support the success of the placement. Unplanned endings are rare.

Children have fun and enjoy trips and events arranged by the fostering agency. For example, all children and their families were recently invited to go on a trip to the seaside and a picnic. Children, especially those new to the UK, have opportunities to visit places of interest. Foster families celebrate festivals, organise activities and host family events which help children to feel very much part of the family.

The assessment of prospective foster carers is of a high standard. Assessment reports are comprehensive and analytical. The foster carers' annual reviewing process ensures that foster carers remain suitable to care for children.

Children receive support that prepares them for adulthood. Foster carers help older children to develop practical skills that develop their independence. For example, children learn how to shop, prepare meals, use public transport, and manage their money. Some older children have also found jobs.

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

Children feel very safe with their foster families. They are protected from harm, neglect, or abuse. Children identify their foster carers as the trusted adults they speak to about any concerns they have.

Children benefit from the fostering agency's clear child protection policies and Procedures, which staff and foster carers adhere to. Staff and foster carers regularly complete safeguarding training.

Children are largely not involved in offending behaviour, gang affiliation, the misuse of substances or alcohol, self-harm or going missing from care. Such incidents are rare. When these do happen, children and foster carers receive support and advice that help them to manage risks. However, some risk assessments do not highlight all known or emerging risks. Risk assessments do not consistently outline strategies for foster carers to use to limit known risks.

Foster carers and staff work with children to help them to keep themselves safe, particularly when they are out in the community. Recently, children took part in a workshop run by the local police which focused on county lines and child criminal exploitation.

Foster carers understand and adhere to local missing-from-care protocols. This promotes the safe return of children when they are away from their foster homes without permission.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection. This supports foster carers' safe care of children. However, agency staff do not consistently conduct one unannounced visit to each fostering household every year as required, to help monitor the safety of children.

Since the last inspection, there have been three complaints or allegations made against foster carers. The agency has completed standard of care investigations for all of them. Staff managed each incident appropriately and in accordance with child protection procedures. Investigation reports are comprehensive and are routinely conducted by an independent social worker. At these times, staff took action to ensure that appropriate support was available to the children.

Staff and foster carers work effectively and in close partnership with safeguarding professionals. This is particularly the case when there are concerns for children's safety. In such cases, managers and staff are quick to request, and then fully contribute to, strategy and professionals' meetings. These are to review the effectiveness of children's safety plans and decide how best to keep children from harm.

The fostering agency's recruitment and vetting of staff and panel members are largely in accordance with safe recruitment practices. This ensures that staff are suitable to work with children. However, managers do not consistently explore with candidates gaps in their employment histories, as required.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership and management of the service are effective. Since the last inspection, the registered manager has completed the required leadership and management qualification. Leaders and managers have high aspirations for children in their care and strive to improve the quality of the service. They can demonstrate the difference the fostering agency is having on children's lives.

Managers ensure that there are comprehensive plans in place for children. These highlight the needs of children and how the fostering agency plans to meet these needs. Staff ensure there is effective, consistent partnership working with other professionals, which helps to coordinate children's safe care.

Leaders and managers monitor the quality of care that children receive and demonstrate oversight of the fostering service. However, file audits and the monitoring of case records are not consistently effective. Managers are yet to centralise key records, to make it easier to collate information and identify gaps and trends. This is the case for some annual review reports, incident reports and foster carer training logs. The fostering agency's development plan has not been updated.

Children settle quickly with their foster families. Where possible, children have introductory visits before the placement starts. Children receive good information about the fostering agency and a welcome pack to introduce them to the service. The children's guides are easy-read booklets which have been translated into a number of different languages.

The fostering panel promotes safe and secure foster care placements. The panel functions robustly; the process is orderly and democratic. Panel members have good experience and expertise in their chosen fields, which are relevant to the fostering task. The administration of the fostering panel is well organised.

Foster carers receive excellent support. They identify this as a clear strength of the service. A foster carer said, 'We have all the support we need. Staff and managers are available when we need anything, no hesitation. They're helpful in all aspects.' Foster carers' training and development activities are wide ranging and effective in meeting the needs of children. However, managers do not consistently ensure that

specialist training is provided to foster carers approved to provide parent and child placements.

Staff are also well supported. They receive regular and meaningful individual and group reflective supervision. Staff all say that they are very well led by the management team. One member of staff said, 'My support and supervision is really good, helpful and informative. Managers offer sound advice and guidance, which meets my needs.' Staff work in close collaboration with each other and foster carers. This promotes consistency, as well as supporting stability of foster placements.

A social worker said of a foster care placement, '[Names of children] are thriving within their home. The carer is supportive, nurturing, and compassionate, works well with the professional network. The children are flourishing, and all needs have been met. The agency is going the extra mile to ensure the best interests for these 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, The 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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that robust risk assessments are completed and implemented.</p>	1 January 2024
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless</p> <p>full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3) Schedule 1.6)</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the agency has all required staff information, including a full employment history.</p>	1 January 2024
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that specialist training is provided to foster carers approved to provide parent and child placements.</p>	1 February 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that social workers carry out at least one unannounced visit to foster carers' homes each year. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format, and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. This relates to records of incidents, records of foster carers' annual reviews and foster carers' training logs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.1)
- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. In particular, that the fostering agency's development plan is updated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)

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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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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