

icanfoster

Ican Foster Ltd

Suite 9, Unit B5, Halesfield 8, Telford, Shropshire TF7 4QN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A small private company operates this fostering agency, which was first registered in 2020. The agency currently has 12 fostering households that provide long-term and short-term care for children, including some who only provide respite stays. At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for 24 children in 10 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 January 2025

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 **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 17 January 2022

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 are happy and feel well cared for by their foster carers. During the inspection, seven children shared their views through video calls, pictures, letters and a video. One child said living with their foster carer is 'like a family home, it's my second family. [Name of foster carer] treats us like her own children, and she does it because she cares.' Another child said that their foster home is 'amazing' and they know that the rules are there to keep them safe.

Children make good progress from their starting points because of the sensitive care that they receive. One child who had significant language delays is now communicating well and no longer needs specialist support. This has enabled the child to express their feelings more, which means that their behaviour is now less challenging.

Foster carers support children to engage in education and children's attendance at school is very good. When there are difficulties with children's education, the agency is proactive and creative in solving the problems. On one occasion, the agency gave money to a child's school to allow them to provide dedicated support when their funding had been delayed. Without this funding, the child would not have been able to attend school. Such support demonstrates the agency's commitment to children's education.

Children are supported to enjoy a range of activities and pursue hobbies. Children enjoy attending drama clubs, baking and visits to the skate park. Many of the children enjoy family holidays in England and abroad. The agency also arranges different events for the foster families to enjoy, including an annual bird watch and Christmas parties.

Managers do not always show how important placement decisions are made. Their assessments about whether foster carers have the appropriate skills and experience to meet a child's needs are not recorded, and there is no evidence of how the impact on other children in the household has been considered. In addition, exemption processes have not been correctly followed when more than three unrelated children are placed together. More robust procedures would assist the agency to demonstrate how decisions have been made and that all relevant authorities have been consulted.

Foster carers ensure that children attend their health appointments and enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Several children had very limited diets when they arrived, but with the support from their foster carers they are now willing to try a range of healthy foods.

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

Children know who to talk to when they have concerns. They feel confident to confide in their foster carers but also understand where else they can get support. Some children have close relationships with pastoral staff at school and daily check-ins help them to feel safe. Children are regularly seen by their supervising social workers and are encouraged to share their views about where they live.

Managers and staff understand the importance of keeping children safe. Children's plans show known risks and are reviewed regularly. In some plans, more detailed information is needed about the strategies to be used to manage the risks. For example, one child had a history of self-harm and going missing from home, but the plans were not clear about what action should be taken in the event of an incident. This recording issue has not had an impact on children to date.

Managers handle complaints well. The agency has only received one complaint since the last inspection, and it was investigated and responded to appropriately.

Leaders have not ensured that foster carers receive training to administer medication safely, and recording and monitoring of medication requires improvement. The agency does not care for any children with complex health needs. However, some children do require medication for ongoing health conditions. No children have suffered any harm, however, managers need to implement effective systems to assure themselves that medication is being well managed.

Concerns about foster carers' practice are taken seriously, and appropriate action is taken to ensure that children are safe. There is effective multi-agency working to discuss concerns and implement safety plans. The agency completes investigations when required, and foster carers' approval is reviewed by foster panel to ensure that they remain suitable to foster. Despite this good practice, not all the serious concerns raised had been notified to Ofsted. Managers failed to demonstrate that they understand their responsibility to do this.

Safer recruitment checks are completed for staff, panel members and foster carers. On one occasion, an assessment of a potential foster carer was presented to foster panel without all the checks having been received. Managers must ensure that all checks have been received before making a recommendation to panel, to ensure that only suitable people are approved to be foster carers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The agency has been managed by the same experienced manager since it opened. He supervises some of the fostering households as well as managing the agency. The manager has built positive relationships with foster carers and the children they care for and is well respected by them.

Since the last inspection, there has been a change of responsible individual. A decision was made to combine the role with that of the agency decision-maker. Leaders and managers failed to fully consider the potential conflict of interest this would bring. The responsible individual has involvement in some social work tasks, which limits their ability to make objective decisions.

Leaders and managers do not always use monitoring systems effectively to ensure that they have good oversight of the agency. The responsible individual does not complete any routine monitoring of the agency. There is a lack of monitoring tools and there is no monitoring of important areas such as accidents and medication. Several important documents were missing from children's files but there was no evidence of escalation to the placing authority. The manager relies on his memory rather than records when completing the review of quality of care report. As a result, the reports do not contain sufficient information and the information about some incidents is inaccurate.

Managers do not always take robust action when foster carers do not complete their records or do not keep up to date with required training. Despite discussions taking place, there has been no further action when improvements are not made. On one occasion, carers' records were delayed by several months and action taken had failed to bring about significant improvement.

Managers have made some improvements to the agency records system. However, documents are still not saved in a consistent way. On several occasions during the inspection, there was difficulty locating documents. Further improvements are needed to ensure that all records are stored in a consistent and accessible way.

Arrangements for panel are not always well managed. On one occasion, there were insufficient panel members present, meaning that the panel was not quorate. This was identified by the panel chair, however, the manager instructed that the panel meeting should go ahead. In addition, documents are not always sent to panel members in good time before meetings, and feedback from panel to the agency is not consistently received.

Managers and staff do not complete training to assist them in specialist roles. For example, the panel chair has not completed relevant training for their role, the manager and supervising social worker have not completed training to assist in their panel adviser roles, and the responsible individual has not completed training on the expectations of the role, despite it being the first time they have held the position. Shortfalls in knowledge of regulations demonstrate that this training is required.

The agency has not provided all carers with training on key issues such as radicalisation, online safety, medication or behaviour management. In addition, foster carers have not always completed training to meet children's specific needs. One child presented with self-harming behaviour, but their foster carer had not received any training on how to manage their needs. Despite the lack of training, carers have managed the children's needs well, but the agency needs to do more to equip their carers with the knowledge they need to care for children safely.

The manager and staff team provide a high level of support to foster carers, who receive regular supervision visits and unannounced visits. Visits are increased as and when needed, which allows staff to monitor any concerns. Relationships with foster carers are strong and foster carers are confident that they can always access support when needed. One foster carer said they 'can't fault anything' and another said they 'would never foster for anywhere else'.

Feedback from stakeholders is very positive. Placing social workers were complimentary about the care that children receive and the communication with the agency. Foster carers really value the small, family feel of the agency and the support available to them.

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 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.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (3))</p> <p>In particular, the provider must ensure that children's care documents are received from the child's placing authority, and that the matter is escalated if they are not received.</p> <p>It also relates to ensuring that all foster carers complete a range of training to support them to meet children's needs. This should include training on radicalisation, online safety, safer care, medication and any other training related to the specific needs of the children they care for.</p> | 21 March 2025 |
| <p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a</p> | 21 March 2025 |

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| <p>fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the provider must ensure that there are effective monitoring systems in place to provide effective oversight of carer records, children’s documents and all events listed in schedule 6.</p> | |
| <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))</p> | 21 March 2025 |
| <p>No business may be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel—</p> <p>either the person appointed to chair the panel or one of the vice chairs,</p> <p>one member who is a social worker who has at least three years’ relevant post-qualifying experience, and</p> <p>three, or in the case of a fostering panel established under regulation 23(5) four, other members, and</p> <p>where the chair is not present and the vice chair who is present is not independent of the fostering service provider, at least one of the other panel members must be independent of the fostering service provider. (Regulation 24 (1)(i)(ii)(iii))</p> | 21 March 2025 |
| <p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the provider must ensure that placement decisions consider how the foster carers can meet a child’s needs and the impact on any children already living in the home, and that such decisions are recorded. It also relates to</p> | 21 March 2025 |

ensuring that all necessary checks have been received before assessments are referred to fostering panel.

It also relates to ensuring that panel papers are received by panel members at least five days before meetings. In addition, it relates to ensuring that risks to children are fully understood, and that thorough risk assessments and missing-from-care protocols are in place and are communicated to foster carers.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that there are efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems, in place. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 27.1)
- The registered person should follow Schedule 7 to the Children Act 1989 which limits the number of children who may be fostered by a foster carer. The "usual fostering limit" is set at three. This means that no one may foster more than three children unless:
 - the foster children are all siblings in relation to each other (in which case there is no upper limit), or
 - the local authority within whose area the foster carer lives exempts the foster carer from the usual fostering limit in relation to specific placements (in which case they must set out the terms as detailed below).

(The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, page 47, paragraph 5.46)

- The registered person should ensure that managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, should be clearly defined. In particular, ensure that the agency decision-maker does not have involvement in social work tasks that may cause a conflict of interest in their decision-making. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.4)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff have their individual performance formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.6)

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: 2576457

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Responsible individual: Christopher Cook

Registered manager: Anthony Collier

Telephone number: 01952 601085

Inspector

Vicky Smith, Social Care Inspector

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