

Flying Colours Foster Care

Flying Colours Foster Care Limited

Flying Colours Foster Care, The Dairy House, Brockton, Eccleshall, Stafford ST21 6LY
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A small private company operates this fostering agency. The carers mainly provide long-term and short-term care. Currently, there are 17 carers in nine households, caring for 12 children.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 June 2017

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: 24 May 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: Adequate

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The outcomes for the vast majority of children are excellent.
- Children experience long-term placements. Disruptions occur very rarely. This gives children the stability they need.
- Some aspects of the leadership of the service are inspirational. The commitment and focus on children's needs is outstanding. Foster carers, and staff, are immensely loyal to the agency because of the effectiveness of this ethos.
- Foster carers say that they feel like 'colleagues'; their views influence the agency. The support provided by staff to foster carers is excellent.
- Children do well in their education and develop interests and hobbies. Foster carers prepare children well for their next steps.
- Foster carers and staff have great insight into children's emotional needs and understand what to do to help them. Consequently, most children's emotional health improves substantially.
- Staff have formed outstanding partnerships with other professionals and this supports children's progress.
- The staff and foster carers listen to children's views and act on them. Children's needs are central and they very rarely feel the need to complain.
- Children stay safe and learn to look after themselves.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- A lack of monitoring, by the registered manager, against the regulations and National Minimum Standards leads directly to the shortfalls identified in this inspection.
- Panel management is not rigorous.
- The agency decision-maker has not maintained his social work registration with the Health Care Professionals Council. As a result, he is not a registered social worker, as is required. This potentially reduces the engagement of this individual and undermines the quality of his contribution.
- The registered manager is also a supervising social worker but does not receive appropriate supervision.
- The registered manager does not hold the relevant management qualification.

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
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training and information as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1)) This is with regard to addressing the induction standards, required courses, and important topical subjects in a timely way.	25/09/2017
The registered person must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate supervision. (Regulation 21(4)(a)) This applies to the manager.	28/08/2017
The fostering service provider must appoint one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the panel is absent or that office is vacant ('the vice chairs') from the persons on the central list. (Regulation 23(4)(ii))	31/07/2017
The fostering service provider must enter into a written agreement with carers covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the 'foster care agreement'). (Regulation 27(5)(b), Schedule 5)	28/08/2017
The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. This system must provide for consultation with placing authorities. (Regulation 35(1)(b) and 35(3))	31/07/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of a new placement on existing household members is considered. (NMS 15.1)
- Ensure that appointees to the role of registered manager who do not have the management qualification enrol on a management training course within six months, and obtain a relevant management qualification within three years, of their appointment. (NMS 17.3)
- Ensure that the agency decision-maker is a social worker. (NMS 23.12)
- Ensure that all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards and with the service's

- policies and procedures. (NMS 25.3)
- Review each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, annually against agreed performance objectives. The agency decision-maker should review the performance of panel chair, and for this purpose may attend a proportion of panel meetings, but only as an observer. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume: Fostering Services, page 41, paragraph 5.15)
 - Ensure that the written minutes of panel business are full and accurate so that the fostering service is clear about matters discussed and the reasoning behind recommendations made. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume: Fostering Services, page 43, paragraph 5.25)
 - Ensure that, if the fostering service is of the view that the terms of approval of a foster carer should be amended, the decision-maker must issue a determination and follow the procedures referred to in the section on the Independent Review Mechanism, before making a decision. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume: Fostering Services, page 50, paragraph 5.62)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The overall effectiveness of the service is good but the outcomes for children are excellent. The focus of the agency on giving children stability translates into nearly all children being in long-term placements. This exceptionally high proportion is the basis of their marked progress. Their foster carers are completely committed to this objective, which runs through the agency.

All of the children are in education and attendance levels are similar to or better than those of their peers. Children are on target to achieve competitive examination results and some are planning to go to university. Others have high ambitions in other fields. For example, one child is aiming to be an actor. Foster carers support school attendance and high achievement by establishing strong relationships with teachers. Foster carers attend meetings and so they are familiar with children's educational needs and support children accordingly. One foster carer identified through her own research that her foster child had a learning disability, which a psychiatrist confirmed. This was a substantial contribution towards obtaining the correct education support for the child and subsequently, to his 'massive progress'. This shows that foster carers advocate strongly for children, which promotes children's well-being and progress.

The agency commits time and money to help children's development. For example, the manager commissioned a psychological assessment of one child to avoid delay. This assessment has been a key tool in the work of teachers and other professionals engaged in helping the child. The child has become, in the words of his foster carer, 'a fully functioning member of the school community'. In addition, the registered manager has trained school staff to understand the needs of traumatised children. The school staff's new understanding of attachment and loss benefits all children in the school, not just those who are looked after. The headteacher wrote, 'Over the last two years, we have formed a strong relationship with both the child's foster carers and [the agency]. I have been very impressed with the child-centred approach of the agency and [the manager] in particular. His deeply considered manner and thoughtful observations when discussing the progress and needs of the child have led to very successful outcomes.'

Some children have made remarkable progress. One child has moved from adopting the foetal position in school to achieving academic and sporting success. Another child was unable to communicate and now engages effectively with others at his nursery. One boy sat outside his class every day. He is now fully engaged in his learning inside the classroom, with all the benefits that brings. Another child was 'screaming, throwing, banging', but now sits in the classroom and enjoys overnight activities. His foster carer said, 'You wouldn't know his needs now: he is well turned out and ready to work. You would not pick him out he is doing so well.'

With encouragement from their foster carers, children enjoy wide-ranging social and recreational activities. One child attends a socially based activity project for children

with special needs. Another enjoys outdoor success growing vegetables in her carer's allotment. A child said, 'It's nice here. My carers are fun and caring.' For the first time, one child attends community activities, including scouts, football and cricket. This has given him sporting and social skills, which he is looking forward to using for years to come. Others attend cadets and gain technical skills. Several children have been excited to travel abroad for the first time. Two foster carers reported that their foster child had 'learned to laugh and joke'.

Children make clear progress with their emotional health because of strong, stable relationships with their foster carers. One foster carer said, 'Sometimes, [they] challenge me to the core but we have seen a result and a change in their behaviour, which is significant.' Some children receive help directly from mental health services, and others benefit from their carers receiving professional guidance. Children learn to be aware of others, establish relationships, and to articulate difficult emotions. Children with significant emotional difficulties learn new strategies, including expressing their feelings verbally to their carers and others. One gained the strength to ask her parents why they had had more children. In addition, many establish groups of supportive friends. Consequently, risk-taking behaviour reduces and children take advantage of the positive opportunities on offer. One foster carer wrote about her foster child, 'She is aware of the change; she is more settled, happier in herself and falls on friends and her teachers for help.' Another carer said, '[My foster child] was quite introverted and couldn't make friends. She had counselling and is right as rain and has made progress in these areas.'

Several foster carer households care for siblings. This has important benefits for these children, especially in terms of their emotional welfare. Carers sustain vital links with children's families and encourage positive interactions. This occurs even when local authorities place children a long way away.

A number of children have additional needs due to physical or learning difficulties. Professionals did not expect one child to walk or talk and due to his carer's perseverance he is now doing both. This independence has increased his opportunities at nursery and at his Sunday school. His carer said, 'His progress is remarkable and beyond what anyone expected.' One professional wrote, 'The ethos of the company is inclusivity... working with all children irrespective of difference is evident in all their work and communications. The agency has a clear commitment to each child irrespective of their individual presentation, ethnic or cultural background.'

Children are familiar with the agency and its staff and feel part of the extended 'family' that the organisation has created. The vast majority attend social events organised by the agency. Furthermore, several foster carers have provided ideas to improve the agency. For example, panel members now use their questions during interviews with new foster carers. One carer said, 'We see each other through the year and it is so helpful for the children to know there are other children like them. We do social things together and it is empowering for them. They play and have fun. The photos and books [the staff compile] are a true reflection of [this agency]. It is like a small family and we would not have this with another agency.' Children feel that their foster carers look after them well and that they treat them fairly. The

agency takes into account the views and needs of the sons and daughters of carers, when this is applicable.

Foster carers help children increase their independence progressively, for example by obtaining part-time jobs. Foster carers prepare children well for their transition to adulthood. However, one foster carer commented on the lack of local authority resources, 'Each stage was a battle with the local authority.' Foster carers and their supervising social workers challenge the placing authorities about shortfalls. Most foster carers readily agree to children remaining beyond their 18th birthdays, especially when they are still in education. Some generously maintain their support when the children have moved away. For example, one young adult receives ongoing help from his ex-carers to manage his money. For most foster carers in the agency, such transitions come after many years of care and these are emotionally challenging for them too. One foster carer reflected that children do not always show their appreciation. '[However]', she said, 'some stay in touch, which shows there was a bond. Some have children of their own.' Another commented, 'We have received constant 24-hour support and advice through this difficult time.'

In the vast majority of cases, the agency is extremely careful about placing children with foster carers. This is why placements last so long. On the rare occasions that placements have broken down, there were shortfalls in the matching process. In some cases, the agency was not sufficiently clear how it came to its decision, given the weight of contra-indications. The consequences were considerably unsettling for everyone concerned.

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

Children are safe. Almost no serious incidents have occurred that required notification either to Ofsted or to social workers. This is not to say that children do not challenge their foster carers. However, the agency applies a very clear philosophy that negative behaviour is a form of communication, usually arising from children's traumatic backgrounds. Consequently, foster carers maintain a clear focus.

Foster carers aim to understand their foster children, even under difficult circumstances. A foster carer reflected on this philosophy by saying firmly, '[He's] not a naughty boy!' A supervising social worker wrote, 'Our carers are very aware of the importance of creating a secure base for each child in which they feel emotionally and physically safe. Predictable routines and clear boundaries are an important part of this.' Foster carers do this with regular advice from their supervising social workers and other professionals, such as the consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist. One foster carer said, '[he] brings moments of enlightenment'. Another foster carer said, '[My child] had absolute anger and when people knocked at the door she would hide in the garden or lock herself in the bathroom. She has learned how to behave appropriately, with a lot of help.' Another foster carer described how she helped her foster child deal with bullying without resorting to physical retaliation. Children respect this approach even when they feel argumentative and confrontational. This process goes a long way towards achieving one of the stated objectives of the company, which is helping children develop into 'well-rounded adults capable of forming meaningful relationships despite their

previously neglectful and damaging experiences’.

The few safeguarding concerns that have arisen since the last inspection have involved children going missing. These incidents raise the potential risk of child sexual exploitation. Through their hard work, staff and carers reduce risks when they occur. On one occasion, a member of staff intercepted a child on a train and prevented the situation escalating. The previous manager refined the agency’s policy on this matter. This improvement increased the supervising social worker’s attention to police protocol and improved their monitoring of the provision of return home interviews by local authorities. The agency learned that a favourable lack of incidents created practice risks, even though the training of staff and carers was up to date. One carer said, ‘The training is incredibly good. We did one on self-harming. It was powerful and life-changing and made you think.’ A local authority social worker said, ‘[My child] is managed so well; his carers are very capable and they just get on with it. [He] is so happy and settled.’

The agency’s records show substantial declines in the level of risks that children face or create. Last year, for example, one child went missing on several occasions but has now ceased entirely. Foster carers adapt their strategies according to the situation. They have clear methods of controlling children’s access to social media and mobile telephones, when necessary. A panel member wrote, ‘The agency has examined ways of lessening children’s vulnerabilities [in order] to prevent the [risks] of exploitation occurring. I believe that the agency have a good understanding in this area.’ However, no training has occurred to help carers and children, where appropriate, understand female genital mutilation or the risks of radicalisation.

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

Overall, leadership and management require improvement in order to achieve a good standard. The leadership of the service is powerfully effective in important ways, such as developing a child-centred ethos and culture. However, this inspection has identified shortfalls, which undermine the quality of some aspects of the service.

The registered manager, who is also one of two supervising social workers, does not have meetings with an appropriate supervisor. As a result, he does not have the opportunity to reflect on his own practice and consider the development of the service as a whole. This limits the capacity for improvement.

Ofsted has recently registered the manager but, as the owner of the company, he has been actively involved in a leadership role since taking over the service in 2011. Although the manager is suitably experienced, he has yet to complete a management qualification. He has just enrolled on a level 5 management course. A recommendation is raised to ensure that the registered manager completes the course within the timescales set out in the National Minimum Standards.

Two experienced practitioners have managed the service since the last inspection. One member of staff described the recently departed manager as ‘rigorous and outward-looking – a safe pair of hands’. Previous inspections identified managerial

deficiencies, which the last manager addressed.

After a difficult period, the number of foster carers has stabilised at 17 in nine households. A member of staff said, 'the service is more cohesive now'. Foster carers are enthusiastic about the agency's small size. One said, 'The beauty of this agency is its small scale.' Carers say such things as, 'We all know each other,' 'We feel part of a large family,' 'We are listened to and taken seriously,' and, 'We like the passion for children – that's why we stay.'

The supervising social workers take great care to introduce potential foster carers into the group. The fostering service does not usually accept applications until individuals have completed their basic training. This process is flexible but gives both parties plenty of opportunities to consider the issues. New foster carers feel very positive about the approval process. Assessments are thorough. The agency decision-maker is a qualified social worker. However, he is no longer registered with the Health Care Professionals Council, as required. This does not meet the National Minimum Standards and so undermines the quality of his contribution.

The responsible individual completes the assessments of new foster carers and foster carers' annual reviews. Because she is married to the manager, this creates a potential conflict of interest. The agency addresses this by ensuring that there is a particularly high proportion of independent panel members. Additionally, the panel hears every third annual review. This is good practice because it keeps the panel active and incorporates a modest amount of independent analysis into the agency.

The registered manager organises the panel. Panel meets several times a year and makes thoroughly considered recommendations. However, the management of the panel by the current and the previous registered managers is weak. This creates shortfalls in the process and demonstrates a lack of understanding of how the service is required to operate. For example, the annual appraisals of the panel chairperson and panel members are not up to date; there is no vice-chairperson; the quality of the meetings minutes is poor, and business issues are not resolved in a timely way. The decision-maker is not in a position to appraise the panel chairperson because he has not attended a panel meeting. The statement of purpose says that panel will advise on policies and procedures and present an annual report to the directors but it does not do either. Some of these shortfalls are administrative but they reduce the effectiveness of the service, create tensions unnecessarily, and reduce the opportunities for improvement.

The manager undertakes all of the monitoring of the service but it is weak in places. He submits regular reports to Ofsted and, following discussions with Ofsted, improved the content and evaluation of some of the required issues. However, such processes are not systemic and do not ensure that the agency meets all the regulations, National Minimum Standards or company procedures. There is insufficient understanding of some regulations and standards, including the management of changes in carers' terms of approval. Furthermore, the agency does not have clear processing in place to use the views of placing authorities to inform service development.

The support of foster carers by the agency is excellent. The agency methodically applies a strong sense of inclusivity and equality, which is supportive to the adults and benefits children. Foster carers say that they feel like colleagues and cannot praise the staff enough. One said, 'It's a lonely job but we trust the staff and they don't judge us.' The supervising social workers conduct supervisory visits but go beyond that, helping with babysitting and school runs, sometimes over several years. They provide an out-of-hours service, too, which foster carers say is 'superb'. Foster carers who live several hours' drive from the agency confirm that staff apply this level of service to everyone. All foster carers attend the support meetings regularly and value them highly. One foster carer reflected the views of all by saying, 'We all know each other. Other foster carers are the biggest help.'

The quality of the training programme for foster carers is variable. On the one hand, the quality of courses and their impact is exceptional. One foster carer said, 'Excellent speakers. Exemplary. I strongly feel that the support and training is second to none and is relevant to our type of fostering.' One recent course helped foster carers understand how trauma affects children's brains and therefore their behaviour. As a result, foster carers demonstrate a particularly thorough understanding of their foster children's needs. This is particularly evident regarding the aspects related to identity, attachment and loss. They demonstrate this in their perseverance, which children reflect in their positive progress. In addition, foster carers are able to articulate their enthusiasm and understanding. Children respond well to this and it is a valuable contribution to conversations with professionals.

However, the other key feature of the training programme is its shortfalls. Foster carers have not received training in required topics, including health and hygiene and medication administration. One foster carer has not completed the induction standards six years after being approved. Furthermore, important topical subjects are omitted, including radicalisation and female genital mutilation. These shortfalls increase the risk of foster carers making mistakes or not fulfilling their legal duties.

Each foster carer has a foster carer agreement, as required. However, these contracts do not reflect the regulation accurately, are out of date in some places, and give carers an imprecise impression of the training they are required to undertake. These shortfalls call into question the validity of the contracts and create inaccurate expectations.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC440078

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