

The Fostering Foundation

The Fostering Foundation Limited

46-47 Brook Street, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0HE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is an independent fostering agency based in the south-west region of England. The main branch office is based in Tavistock, with one smaller office operating in Bristol.

The service provides a range of fostering services, including short-term, long-term and emergency care, for children and young people who may have complex care needs.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 March 2022

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: 30 September 2019

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

Due to COVID-19, meetings and visits have in the majority been carried out virtually. Face-to-face visits have now started to take place, although these have been delayed despite relaxed restrictions. Training for carers, and panel meetings, remain online.

Despite restrictions due to the pandemic, a good level of support to carers and children has continued. A new peer support system is also being piloted in the Bristol area which is aimed at further helping to prevent carers feeling isolated.

Young people's groups and a children's panel are also in place, and face-to-face meetings have been held where possible. Children have also enjoyed activities facilitated by the agency such as high ropes and archery, bushcraft and survival skills, snowboarding, skiing, tobogganing and snow-tubing.

The progress and outcomes for each child are now collated and monitored, which was not happening previously. The stability of children's placements is now also monitored to help identify any support needs and to support stability.

All children of the relevant age are attending school or further education. When children arrive at their new home, education provision is arranged quickly.

Children spoken with during the inspection said they felt safe, happy and loved by their carers. They know how to share any worries or concerns which they may have and spoke fondly of their carers. Some children support the panel, asking carers and staff questions which they have thought of themselves. They have also enjoyed the fun days provided by the agency.

The information provided to children before they arrive is child centred and written in an age-appropriate way. This helps children understand what to expect and allay any concerns they may have. These documents have been redesigned by the current manager.

Children are not always visible within records of visits by supervising social workers. This includes a lack of child-centred narrative regarding the lived experiences of children within recordings of unannounced visits. Unannounced visits are also not always carried out in a timely way, for example when there are complex situations or carers are relatively newly approved.

Some language within children's records is not child centred and carers are not always challenged when using inappropriate terms. The manager is aware of this and is facilitating restorative language training soon.

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

Children and young people are safeguarded by the practice of the staff at the agency. The manager in particular drives good practice in the actions she takes to keep children safe. Responses to any concerns are timely and effective. This includes the management of allegations, and action taken to address any concerns within the standards of care process.

Overall, safer care planning is of a good standard. Plans provide thorough and clear guidance to help carers meet the individual needs of children. However, at times plans do not cover all relevant risk issues. This includes a shortfall in safety planning within one parent and child placement. Plans are also not always signed off as agreed by the relevant professionals. However, these types of placements are well supported and closely monitored. Any concerns are shared with local authorities in a timely way.

Physical interventions have been used in two households. No concerns regarding the practice used by carers in this respect were identified.

When children go missing from home or school, action taken to find them and support for them is good. However, it is not always clear if independent discussions have taken place when children return home. The manager has clarified this expectation now within a re-devised missing policy.

Several children cared for are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. One of these children was spoken with during the inspection. This child is happy in their home and has been reunified with their sibling, who was already living with the foster family which they have joined. This is a fantastic outcome for the siblings.

Five young people are currently staying with their carers post the age of 18. Carers of these young people do not have the relevant adult safeguarding training to provide these types of placements. The manager arranged for carers to complete this during the inspection.

Matching assessments are completed. However, some sampled did not fully consider the impact on all children when a new child moves into the home. The assessments also do not always consider any vulnerabilities within the home and any additional support which may be needed.

One carer spoken with was not clear when to use the out-of-hours support system. This raises a concern as to whether the right protocol would be followed in a crisis.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager has only been in post since November 2021. However, she has made significant positive changes to date. She is proactive and tenacious in her approach.

A significant amount of feedback received from the staff team further demonstrates the manager's commitment to driving improvement at the agency.

The manager has a strong approach to safeguarding. She advocates for children when she believes their best interests are not being met by other professionals. She has also realigned risk assessment processes with the signs of safety approach, and is ensuring that important policies are purposeful and adhere to current legislative requirements. These include an updated missing policy, safeguarding policy, parent and child protection policy and other key practice guidance.

Assessments of new carers are thorough and considered. The further development of these is a key focus of the managers, as inconsistency in standards was previously an issue.

Panel records demonstrate that challenge and appropriate conditions are used when there are concerns. The panel is functioning well. However, at times, the rationale of the agency decision-maker is lacking. This includes a lack of analysis regarding any identified vulnerabilities within the assessments of carers.

There have been 17 unplanned endings to children's placements since the previous inspection. Learning from these could not be seen, which would help inform future placement planning.

Supervising social workers hold small caseloads, and this is reflected in their availability to carers. A significant amount of positive feedback from carers has been received, which reflects the quality of support that they receive. However, some carers feel that in-house respite opportunities are lacking, which means that carers and children cannot always access this support when needed.

Carers are required to complete mandatory training, which includes specific safeguarding training. This is closely monitored during supervision sessions. Therefore, training is completed within timescales. Currently, this training is carried out online.

Safer recruitment practice is followed. This ensures that all the necessary checks are completed when staff join the agency.

The manager has submitted all the required documents to become registered with Ofsted. She is awaiting her interview.

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
<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>In particular, safer care plans must be comprehensive and individualised to the needs of the child. This especially includes safer care planning for parent and child placements. These must also be reviewed to ensure that they evolve in line with any significant changes.</p>	5 May 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', page 30, paragraph 14.7)
- The registered person should 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 the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering services: National minimal standards', page 32, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of

meetings for short-break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files should include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering services: National minimum standard', page 43, paragraph 21.8)

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: 1378486

Registered provider: The Fostering Foundation Limited

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Responsible individual: Geoffrey Lewis

Registered manager: post vacant

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Inspectors

Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

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