

The Fostering Foundation

The Fostering Foundation Limited

74a Regent Street, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8JA

Monitoring visit

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 Bristol, with smaller offices operating in Exeter and Tavistock.

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

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 March 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 21 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The experiences and progress of children are mixed. Some children are making good progress and have stable and settled homes and feel part of the family. Planning for children to move in with foster carers is carefully considered. This helps foster carers to prepare for children's arrival and for children to feel welcomed into their new home, and it contributes to placement stability. However, some children do not receive the help and support that they require in a timely way. This has prevented them from making progress and has destabilised placements.

Children are seen and spoken to by social workers during some visits to the home. However, there is not a strong focus on ensuring that children's voices are heard. This specifically applies to when incidents have occurred and when considering children's experiences of living with their foster carers. Children are not routinely spoken to about making complaints when they raise concerns about their foster carers or the care that is provided to them.

When appointed to work with a child, the agency's support workers build positive relationships and see them regularly. They help children to talk about issues that impact on their lives. However, discussions that are critical to fully understanding children's experiences and to helping them learn how to keep themselves safer following incidents do not take place regularly. At times, these relationships have also been disrupted by staff turnover.

Children enjoy a range of activities promoted by their foster carers and by the agency. This includes attendance at drama, rugby and scout groups as well as participation in music bands. A strength of the agency is involving children in their service delivery and the activities they plan. The achievements of children are widely celebrated.

When English is not a child's or foster carer's first language the agency supports them to access documents and meetings by using interpreters and having documents translated. Where possible, children's ethnicity and identity needs are considered when placing children with foster carers. Faith-based activities are promoted by foster carers for children.

Children are supported to spend time with those who are important to them. However, the agency does not always effectively complete thorough care planning with the child's placing authority, to ensure that family time is carefully assessed, safe and conducted in the child's best interests.

Social workers visit foster carers regularly, including on an unannounced basis. Out of hours visits are completed if required. This provides essential support to foster carers at times of crisis. However, records of these visits lack the detail, reflection and professional curiosity required to ensure that foster carers are supported to

meet children's needs and keep them safe. Following incidents, visits are not always timely. This prevents the provision of increased support and oversight of the care provided to children when they most need it. During these visits, when they are conducted, discussion of the events that have occurred do not always take place to help reduce future difficulties. The out of hours service is effective, providing foster carers with the support that they require.

Children are provided with a bright and informative guide to the fostering agency. However, this would not be accessible to younger children or children with additional needs.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The quality of the agency's response when children raise allegations against their foster carers is inconsistent. Children are not always seen and heard, and they do not always receive the support that they need. Investigations are not always comprehensive. When investigations are concluded foster carer suitability is not reviewed as soon as possible. This reduces the wider scrutiny of care provided to children. In addition, allegation monitoring and quality assurance systems are ineffective. They do not assist managers to ensure that all actions are completed following allegations being made.

Risks to children are known and openly discussed. Information is appropriately shared with safeguarding agencies. This strengthens the multi-agency response to keep children safe. Children rarely go missing. When they do, there is a coordinate response to locate the child. However, risk assessments do not include all known information so as to identify and manage risk, and they do not provide clear guidance to foster carers.

The processes related to standards of care have been improved to ensure more consistent response. When concerns are raised about the standards of care provided to children, they are managed effectively. During investigations, additional support and safety measures are implemented to safeguard the child. Reports are completed by an independent person to ensure they are unbiased and beneficial to the agency.

Foster carers rarely use restraint. There was one occasion when restraint was not used appropriately. The agency has addressed this concern. The foster carer has been supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of the child's needs and behaviours and to provide better, non-restrictive responses. When the agency identifies that there is the potential for restraint to be used, training is provided to foster carers to ensure that methods used are safe and only used when necessary.

There are concerns relating to the oversight of parent and child arrangements. Risks are not always fully understood or assessed to ensure that there is robust safety planning in place.

The agency focuses on practicing safer recruitment. Thorough staff recruitment procedures reduce the risk of unsuitable persons being employed. All relevant checks are completed for prospective carers during their assessment process.

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

The agency has been without a registered manager for a lengthy period. Urgent action has not been taken to apply to register the new manager with Ofsted. Some turbulence has been experienced with staffing and management arrangements. This has had an impact on the continuity of support for staff, foster carers and children. However, longstanding staff members provide a wealth of experience and support to foster carers and newer or less-experienced staff. New senior managers have been a positive change for the agency staff and foster carers who speak positively about the direction of the agency under the new leadership.

The monitoring of the quality of care and children's progress is ineffective. While there is some learning from practice, there is not a collective approach to ensure that learning is disseminated across the wider service in order to improve outcomes for children. Actions are not always identified or implemented so as to address all concerns and effect agency wide change. Managers have a thorough understanding of children's individual needs, and the action needed to provide them with the care and safety that they require. They are reflective and acknowledge the shortfalls and have plans in place to address this. However, these plans are not yet embedded into practice.

When the agency has concerns about children not receiving the help that they need from other agencies, they consistently report them to other professionals. However, when their efforts are not effective, escalation methods are not always used to ensure that adequate responses are received. This has meant that some children wait too long for the specialist help that they need. This has had a detrimental impact on their emotional well-being and placement stability.

External professionals speak positively about the communication from the agency to inform children's care planning.

Foster carers are overwhelmingly positive about the agency and the support that they receive from managers and staff. Foster carers who attend support groups find these accessible and beneficial. They are positive about the support that they receive from the therapeutic team.

In the main, training is beneficial to foster carers and staff. However, training does not always meet the learning needs of more experienced foster carers and staff. Foster carer training is reviewed during their supervision visits. However, some essential training, including safeguarding, first aid and safer care planning, is not up to date for all foster carers. Managers have started to implement better, more focused, development plans for foster carers.

The fostering panel runs effectively. There is a strong focus on representing the child's views. Information is received in a timely way and the quality of assessments is improving, including the quality of Form Fs, which are comprehensive and analytical.

Foster carers' logs give an understanding of children's experiences. When concerns are identified about the quality of these records, managers devise support for foster carers to improve these records. This places emphasis on the importance of capturing children's day-to-day lives.

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 prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The written policy must include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with that foster parent.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>liaison and co-operation with any local authority which is, or may be, making child protection enquiries in relation to any child placed by the fostering service provider,</p> <p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(d))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that they have robust and effective monitoring and quality assurance processes in place to record and monitor the actions taken in response to safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>In addition, the registered person must ensure that procedures are followed in the event of an allegation and implement safeguarding measures necessary to protect the child.</p>	12 May 2025
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including	12 May 2025

<p>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 registered person must ensure that they provide foster carers with relevant training that meets their learning needs and that this training is up to date.</p>	
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must have effective systems in place to monitor and review the quality of care that children receive. This must inform clear care planning for children.</p>	12 May 2025
<p>The registered provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency. (Regulation 6 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that any individual appointed as a manager and who intends to register with Ofsted does so within 12 weeks of being appointed.</p>	12 May 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that records of foster carer supervision contain details of discussion, reflection, learning and provide clear action plans and ongoing review of these plans. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.6 page 42)
- The registered person should ensure that all children have access to a children's guide suitable for their age and learning needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 16.3 page 33)

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

Registered provider address: 74a Regent Street, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8JA

Responsible individual: Geoffrey Lewis

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 01822618068

Email address: glewis@fosteringfoundation.co.uk

Inspectors

Carla Simkiss, Social Care Inspector

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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