

Family Foster Care

Family Foster Care Limited
33a Highgate, Beverley, North Humberside HU17 0DN
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Family Foster Care Limited is an independent fostering agency which has been registered since December 2014. The service operates from a registered office in North Humberside, with another supporting office in Doncaster. The agency offers a range of foster placements, including respite, permanent, long-term, short-term, and parent and child arrangements. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 21 fostering households who are caring for 25 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 September 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be 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: 20 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Many children and young people are thriving in long-term, stable and nurturing placements where they have developed close bonds with their carers.
- Healthcare planning is excellent. Children and young people are supported to achieve improved physical and emotional health.
- The agency promotes 'staying put' arrangements. Some young people stay with their carers beyond the age of 18.
- Foster carers are provided with regular supervision, support and training to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.
- The manager of the agency is knowledgeable, child-centred and demonstrates a good understanding of the service's strengths and areas of development.
- Placing authorities and other partners have provided positive feedback about the agency.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Recommendations made by panel at annual reviews are not always recorded on the agency's electronic system.
- Shortfalls were identified in some background checks conducted on prospective foster carers.
- Record-keeping practice varies among different fostering households. The agency's policy does not sufficiently detail the expectations of carers when creating records for children's and young people's files.
- Some carers do not always record information in a manner that distinguishes between opinion and facts, or in ways that are helpful to children and young people who may access their records in the future.
- The agency decision-maker is an independent social worker who is not directly employed by the agency. His role and ability to influence policy and practice in the agency are not clearly defined.
- Risk assessments do not always reflect a multi-agency perspective and could be enhanced to include the placing authorities' views.

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 fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent ("X"), and any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>The report referred to in paragraph (3) must include the following matters in relation to X—</p> <p>The information required by schedule 3 and any other information the fostering service provider considers relevant.</p> <p>Schedule 3</p> <p>Information as to prospective foster parent ("X") and other members of their household and family</p> <p>The outcome of any request or application made by them or any other member of their household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early years provider or later years provider under part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006, including particulars of any previous approval relating to them or to any other member of the household.</p> <p>(Regulation 26(2) Schedule 3(11))</p>	31/10/2018
<p>A fostering service provider must maintain a case record for each foster parent approved by them which must include copies of the documents specified in paragraph (2) and the information specified in paragraph (3).</p> <p>The documents referred to in paragraph (1) are—</p> <p>any recommendations made by the fostering panel.</p> <p>(Regulation 30(1)(2)(b))</p>	31/10/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.5)
When appropriate, the views of the placing authority should be sought and made explicit in the assessment of risk at the matching stage and on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure that the fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for foster carers and those working (including as volunteers) for the fostering service which includes:
where the person has lived outside of the UK, further checks, as are considered appropriate, where obtaining a CRB disclosure is not sufficient to establish suitability to work with children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 19.3)
- Ensure that the fostering service's decision-maker is a senior person within the fostering service, or is a trustee or director of the fostering service, who is a social worker with at least 3 years post-qualifying experience in childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 23.12)
- 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. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.1)
- Ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.5)
- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.6)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people are thriving in stable homes provided by committed foster carers. The agency carefully considers the needs of each child and young person placed and their compatibility with prospective fostering households. Children and young people are well matched to their fostering families and many of them benefit from long-term placements. Wherever possible, children and young people are introduced to their foster carers and visit their new home in advance. When this is not possible, the agency ensures that a planning meeting is held and captures all relevant information to allow it to support the fostering household appropriately to provide a good standard of care.

Matching documents reflect the initial matching considerations and demonstrate that managers request additional information from children's and young people's social workers, to ensure that they have as much information as possible. However, records do not always reflect discussions that have taken place regarding specific matters, such as the compatibility of needs and risks of other children and young people already in placement.

The agency regularly monitors children's and young people's attendance at health appointments. Foster carers ensure that they register children and young people with local healthcare services. Children and young people attend regular appointments and access specialist support when needed. The agency has in-house therapeutic support from a clinician who is able to offer consultation to carers. A support worker in the agency is trained to undertake therapeutic play activities with children. This enhances the emotional well-being of children and young people and has been helpful in stabilising placements and supporting carers.

The agency demonstrates commitment to children and young people beyond the age of 18 and promotes 'staying put' arrangements. Some young people have continued to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. This has provided those young people with enhanced life chances and a stronger support network into adulthood.

Children and young people enjoy family life which includes access to a wide range of activities and community resources. Children and young people enjoy holidays with their foster carers. These opportunities help to enhance children's self-esteem and they grow in confidence. In addition, the agency's support worker ensures that foster carers, children and young people have regular opportunities to meet up with other fostering families. They enjoy fun days out with staff from the agency such as picnics in the park and outings to local attractions. This has helped to build positive and supportive relationships across the agency and fostering households.

Children receive a welcome pack of information following their placement. This includes a copy of the children's guide to the fostering agency and age-appropriate welcome gifts. Contact with families and other important figures in children's and

young people's lives is maintained and promoted, which enhances their sense of identity.

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

Children and young people rarely exhibit challenging or risk-taking behaviour. The agency provides comprehensive supervision and support to carers to ensure that foster carers learn from incidents and to provide guidance on managing future behaviour. The agency has a clear policy on internet safety, and children and young people have engaged in educational activities to help them understand the risks posed through the use of technology. Children and young people have made good progress and become increasingly safer in their foster placements.

Social workers complete unannounced visits to foster carers. Foster carers' homes are routinely subject to health and safety checks. This provides the agency with assurance that children and young people are living in safe environments. Social workers visit fostering households frequently and see the children and young people regularly. Children and young people have opportunities to speak openly about their care experiences to adults who are independent from the household.

Allegations and complaints are dealt with in a timely manner. The manager of the agency shares information with appropriate agencies. When practice concerns have been identified, a combination of supervision and reviews has enabled the agency to make clear recommendations and enhance the practice of foster carers. This has ensured that children and young people are living in households with carers who know how to keep them safe and manage behaviour appropriately.

Assessments of foster carers are thorough and comprehensive. However, this inspection identified some shortfalls in relation to the background checks conducted to ensure that carers are suitable. In one case, a full check with Ofsted was not conducted. The agency had sought information that was available for public view and felt satisfied with this information. In another instance, a disclosure and barring service check was completed but the applicant had lived overseas, and a certificate of good conduct could have been sought additionally. The manager took action to rectify this shortfall during the inspection.

Carers are well prepared for the fostering task and receive input on safe-care practice in their initial training. Each placement has a safe-care policy which outlines the expectations in the home. The staff at the agency consider all the apparent risk, and have an initial planning meeting with the placing local authority, before children and young people are placed with carers. These discussions are not always recorded clearly. A recommendation is made to address this matter, in particular when a higher risk specialist placement is made.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is a qualified social worker and has relevant practice and leadership experience in children's social care and fostering. The manager joined the service in

December 2017 and has made an application to register with Ofsted. She is currently studying for a level 5 management qualification. The manager is knowledgeable and credible and has an in-depth understanding of the service's strengths and areas of development. Throughout the inspection, she demonstrated a passion for improving outcomes for children and young people placed with the agency's carers.

The agency is well resourced. Supervising social workers provide a high level of support for carers. The staff team receives regular supervision and performance appraisal. Social workers feel well supported by their immediate manager. Foster carers have access to regular support groups and an out-of-hours support service. These measures ensure that foster carers have access to advice and guidance and provide opportunities for reflection on their practice. It also allows the agency to identify any areas for learning and development.

The agency's central list of fostering panel members brings a diverse range of backgrounds and experience to the panel. The fostering panel provides scrutiny to applications and reviews that are presented. Strengths and areas of development for applicants are clearly identified, and panel members ensure that appropriate questions are put to presenting social workers and applicants. The quality assurance process of the agency's fostering panel and agency decision-makers is rigorous and effective. The panel provides an appropriate level of independence and is chaired by an experienced practitioner who provides assertive and effective quality assurance.

The manager actively monitors the quality of service provided by the agency. Feedback from children and young people, foster carers, and placing authorities is evident through the annual review process. The recommendations from reviews are not always recorded on the agency's electronic system as required in regulation. There is a varied and effective training and development programme for foster carers, social workers and staff. This ensures that practice is based on the most current research and that foster carers are well supported to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

The agency decision-maker conducts this role in a professional and timely manner. He provides highly comprehensive and qualitative rationale for his decisions. He is not directly employed by the agency and the influence that he has on policy and practice is currently undefined.

Record-keeping practice is variable. The agency's policy does not sufficiently outline the expectations of foster carers in creating records in children's and young people's files. Some records are clear and very well written. Other records are not written in a manner that distinguishes between fact and opinion or in a way that is helpful to children and young people who may choose to access them.

The agency has developed positive working relationships with placing authorities. One social worker commented, 'It was very apparent from the beginning that both girls were extremely settled with [names of the foster carers] and have excellent relationships with them and the rest of their family. They have made excellent progress in all areas of their development since they were placed with [names of the

foster carers] and they afford them an excellent standard of care.’ Another social worker said, ‘I am really pleased with the safe and nurturing care that [names of the foster carers] provide. [Name of the young person] is thriving.’

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 differences 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: SC483928

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Inspector(s)

Nicola Thomas, social care inspector



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