

The Fostering Company

The Fostering Company North East Limited
First Floor, Silverbirch House, Mylord Crescent, Camperdown Industrial Estate,
Killingworth NE12 5UJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Fostering Company is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 2006. The Fostering Company is owned by Five Rivers Childcare Limited. The staff comprises the responsible individual, registered manager, two social workers and a full-time support worker, as well as an administrator. At the time of inspection, the agency had 20 fostering households and a total of 22 children and young people in foster placements. There is one 'staying put' arrangement and two parent and child placements.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 July 2019

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: 27 September 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides foster placements where each child and young person has a stable and secure environment in which they can reach their potential. Children and young people are making progress in all aspects of their day-to-day lives. A foster parent said, 'They are not doing a job, it is a vocation. They are always available.'

Children and young people are welcomed in fostering families and, as a result, they can build meaningful relationships and develop emotional attachments. This means that children and young people can develop a sense of belonging to their fostering families. They build trust in adults and accept help from them when necessary.

Most foster carers were positive about the assessment process, post-approval support and training offered. Children and young people have variable levels of need and carers receive additional support from a network of experienced carers and in regular support groups facilitated by the agency.

The agency's foster carers work well with placing social workers, ensuring that they are part of the team around the child. They play an active part in planning for children and young people. However, the agency does not, in every case, ensure that pathway plans are up to date. This could cause unnecessary anxiety and disruption for children and young people and their foster carers.

Children and young people spoken with during the inspection visit were positive about their fostering families. They mentioned some of the activities they engage in each week, such as army cadets, scouts, after-school clubs and dancing. A range of physical and educational experiences are offered that help them to build confidence and resilience.

Children and young people's health needs are met within supportive home environments. Attendance at general health services is maintained and, where necessary, access to specialist services is supported by carers and agency staff. A foster carer stated that the support from the staff at the agency is 'amazing' for children and young people.

Young people who reach 18 are supported to remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. These are supportive, family arrangements that enable young people to remain in further and higher education as well as accessing apprenticeships. This means that children and young people are helped to fulfil their potential and to give them the necessary skills to succeed into adulthood, financially and emotionally.

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

Placement stability is good. Children and young people are safeguarded effectively by their foster carers and by the agency's rigorous practice in working as a team

with relevant professionals.

Children and young people develop strong, respectful relationships with their carers and social care staff within the agency. The agency takes great care when matching children and young people with foster carers. As a result, risks known are shared and documented into well-written safe caring plans and risk assessments for children and young people.

Despite this, some risks present themselves after the matching process. A collaborative response with a range of professionals ensures that the agency responds quickly to safeguard children and young people and their carers. This ensures that strategies identified are implemented, monitored and reviewed regularly, thus stabilising placements in crisis and ensuring that children's and young people's welfare is supported.

Children and young people rarely go missing from care. However, when they do, well-coordinated responses reduce the harm or risk of harm to them. The agency's foster carers are provided with the relevant local authority missing-from-care policy and procedure. Individual risk assessments followed by the foster carers support safe care. Strong relationships between carers, children and young people ensure that contact is maintained during the time they are away. This leads to a reduction in missing-from-care episodes and a building of trust.

The agency ensures that foster carers are properly trained in their safeguarding responsibilities. This equips them with the competence and skills needed to care effectively for children and young people who have been subject to, or are at risk of, abuse. Children and young people feel safe. The use of physical intervention is rarely required. Foster carers receive training in de-escalation techniques that support positive outcomes for children and young people and maintain their dignity and well-being.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager demonstrates a committed and effective approach to providing high standards of care to children and young people.

There is a shared ethos of equality and diversity, based on teamwork and positivity. The agency is supportive of the carers and endeavours to build positive relationships with children and young people.

Formal supervision of foster carers and support visits to fostering households are frequent, well recorded and effective. Supervising social workers and the support worker often arrange bespoke support to children and young people by providing transport for meetings with birth families, attending after-school clubs and providing leisure activities such as trips to the movies. The well-being and self-esteem of children and young people are at the centre of practice.

Staff are supervised regularly, both formally and informally, when required, as well as having their practice appraised annually. Training, often alongside the agency's

foster carers, enables understanding, relationship building and reflection, thus collectively supporting children and young people to make progress.

The agency's foster carers receive comprehensive training that enables them to provide safe and nurturing care to children and young people. However, not all carers are completing their training, support and development standards within the required 12-month timeframe. The agency needs to ensure that carers are fully supported to attain the appropriate level of knowledge to maintain the overall care of children and young people in placement.

The fostering panel is appropriately experienced. Panel members bring with them a range of experiences in social work, health and education. The chair and vice-chair are part of a core group of members that have been in place since the agency started. The diversity of panel is limited, but the agency is committed to recruiting more members and improving the gender balance. The panel is thorough in its deliberations and ensures that its members are fully apprised of information before making their recommendations.

The panel ensures, where necessary, that agenda items are deferred if it feels that information presented is insufficient to make a firm recommendation. The manager acknowledged a recent shortfall in practice and is taking steps to improve assessment management prior to panel attendance.

The agency decision-maker has come via the new ownership and has demonstrated a thorough approach to his role, considering all information available. Reasons for decisions are well presented and precise. This ensures that decisions are made in the best interests of children and young people.

An up-to-date children's guide and statement of purpose have not been sent to HMCI. This prevents external monitoring and scrutiny. A recommendation regarding this is made at this inspection.

The agency's performance is scrutinised by the manager's comprehensive quarterly and annual monitoring reports. Steps are now in place for wider monitoring and management support processes because of the new ownership. It is, at the time of inspection, too early to evaluate the overall impact on services. The agency, however, inclusive of higher management, has met with carers and staff to support the transition process and to alleviate any perceived concerns.

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 must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide;</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a)(b))</p>	16/08/2019

Recommendations

- The written report on the person’s suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence-based information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider’s fostering teams. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 13.7)
- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 20.3)
- Foster carers contribute to the development of each child’s care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an “eligible” child, and work collaboratively with the young person’s social worker or personal advisor in implementing the plan. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 12.2) In particular, ensure that the pathway plans are current and up to date.

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: SC461357

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Registered provider address: 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury SP1 3UT

Responsible individual: Martin Leitch

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Inspector

Michael Dack, social care inspector



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