

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

This agency has been registered with Ofsted since April 2013.

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 22 fostering households providing care for 34 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted in April 2013.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 September 2023

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: 8 July 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children develop a sense of belonging in stable and secure fostering families. Children live in fostering households that support them to make good progress. Some children have been adopted by carers from this agency. Other children have been able to remain with their foster carers after they turned 18 years of age through 'staying put' arrangements. One set of foster carers welcomed one child to return to live with them after the child reached adulthood.

Children's education needs are well met. All children are in education, employment or training and have the opportunity to receive one-to-one tuition. The majority of children are successful in securing qualifications. This provides children with greater life opportunities. The agency's social workers and foster carers supported one child particularly well into employment, diverting them from the cusp of criminal activity.

Foster carers and the agency's social workers value the importance of children's relationships with their families. Children receive support to travel long distances to spend time with their families. This includes receiving support to see their family members on special days, such as Christmas Day. Children are equally well supported through traumatic life events, such as attending a parent's funeral.

Children have their voices heard through contributing to their carer's annual review. They can also attend a participation forum. One child received support to attend a national youth conference to share their views on issues that affect them. The agency also has an appropriate range of children's guides to meet the needs of the children. The children's guides are age-appropriate and child-friendly. However, children do not always receive a copy of this in a timely manner, which may prevent them from having access to important information.

Children enjoy a range of activities and social events organised by the agency which help them socialise and have fun. The children build happy memories of family experiences and important events, such as planning for the school prom. Carers and social workers take photos of these occasions so that children can look back and remember good times. These photos represent the children's journey with their fostering families and provide an important record of positive memories.

Foster carers record children's daily events in well-written records, using caring language. These records show the strong and nurturing relationships between the children and their carers. When foster carers fail to meet the high standards expected by the agency, the agency's social workers address this through supervision. Foster carers receive support and, where necessary, extra training. This helps to improve the level of care that children receive.

The agency supports some of the children's parents well, such as by the agency's premises being used to support the children's time with their family. Additionally, the agency's premises are used as a neutral venue for parental assessments to take

place. However, the manager relies on the child's social worker to share information with parents, such as about the complaints process. This prevents the manager from being assured that parents receive the necessary information to allow them to have a voice about the agency.

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

Agency staff and foster carers know and understand the risks to each child. These risks and vulnerabilities are recorded in the children's risk assessments, which also include strategies for carers to use to reduce the potential risk of harm. When foster carers identify emerging concerns, these are shared with the agency staff so that risk assessments can be re-evaluated.

Children know how to make a complaint. Children are usually well listened to when they make a complaint or an allegation against a foster carer. Where appropriate, steps are taken to support the child to move to an alternative foster family. Children are informed of the outcome of their complaint.

Foster carers receive training in behaviour management, attachment and trauma. This training enables carers to provide therapeutic approaches to support children when they are upset, and they learn about safe physical intervention techniques and strategies to keep children and others safe from harm. When foster carers have held children, this is usually described in well-written records.

Foster carers speak highly about the level of support they receive from their social worker and the agency's support worker. They describe how the support worker arranges to spend quality time with the children, which allows the carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities and provide independent support to children. This helps to maintain stability in the home in times of need.

The process for the assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough. The agency's social workers' assessments are of a good quality. They are analysed and evaluated by the quality assurance process that is undertaken by the fostering panel. This helps to ensure that foster carers are appropriately assessed and that only those who are suitable are approved to become foster carers.

There is a safer recruitment process in place. This provides the manager with the assurance that those employed by the agency have the necessary knowledge and skills to help keep children safe.

Children who are missing from their home are sometimes reported by the manager as having an unauthorised absence, despite the child's whereabouts being unknown. Additionally, the manager does not have a monitoring system to track whether children are spoken with independently after they return home. The manager is therefore unable to escalate requests when these interviews have not taken place. These shortfalls in recording and monitoring prevent the appropriate mechanisms from being put in place to help improve the safety of children.

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

The registered manager provides a supportive environment for the staff and the foster families. The manager cares about the children and is often involved in supporting them, such as completing direct work with them. There is a dedicated team of social workers and a support worker who show a strong commitment to the children and foster carers.

Monitoring and auditing processes are available to assist the manager in ensuring that the agency's policies and procedures are followed. However, these systems are not regularly used and are therefore not always effective. For example, when one child made an allegation against a foster carer, the manager did not follow the safeguarding procedure. As a result, the manager, who was acting in the role of the agency's social worker for the child, failed to ensure that there was independent scrutiny. The manager also does not have an effective procedure to ensure that notifications are sent to Ofsted in a timely manner. These shortfalls prevent the regulator and safeguarding professionals from being assured that the agency is taking the required steps to safeguard children.

The manager does not document investigations when they take place. This prevents senior leaders from being assured that the agency's procedures are being followed. It also prevents a 'lessons learned' culture from developing, to reduce the likelihood of similar events reoccurring.

The manager does not have an effective system to ensure that the agency's social workers complete and upload important documents to the agency's electronic recording system in a timely manner. This prevents foster carers from accessing essential information in line with the agency's expectations.

When agency staff have requested information from external professionals, the manager does not follow the agency's escalation policy. This prevents the agency from having access to essential information that may help foster carers to keep a child safe and well.

The fostering panel is thorough in its discussions, which are well documented. The agency decision-maker has suitable knowledge and experience for the role. The panel process helps with the safe recruitment of applicants to foster and ensures that the majority of approved foster carers provide the right level of care to the children. However, panel members do not always complete their mandatory training in the agency's timescales. This prevents the manager from being assured that panel members have the most up-to-date information to fulfil their panel responsibilities.

The agency social workers and foster carers receive regular supervision. Supervision with the foster carers is reflective in nature, and the children are at the centre of discussions. Timescales for actions are clear, and there is good reference to staff support and personal development plans.

Foster carers are well trained and receive support with access to the recently implemented electronic recording system. Carers speak positively about the accessibility and quality of the training available, such as face-to-face and online training.

Team meetings are well attended by the staff and manager. Records reflect the detailed discussions about each fostering household. This allows the staff to have a good understanding about each child who is cared for by the agency. This also helps to provide foster carers with consistent advice when carers need out-of-hours support.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that they meet the shortfalls identified that relate to national minimum standards 3, 5, 22 and 25.</p>	31 October 2023
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	31 October 2023

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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Inspectors

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

Evelyn Chafota, Social Care Inspector

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