

The Foster Care Co-operative Ltd

The Foster Care Co-operative, Penny Hall, The Haysfield, Malvern, Worcestershire
WR14 1GF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Co-operative is a non-profitable organisation, which operates across England and Wales. The office is based in Malvern, Worcestershire. It provides short-term, long-term, staying put, sibling groups, short breaks and parent and child fostering placements.

Currently, there are 88 children accessing the fostering service and 73 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 21 to 25 January 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: 9 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children are well matched to their foster families.
- Children make good progress.
- The assessments of foster carers are thorough and analytical.
- Foster carers are well supported and prepared to care for children.
- The fostering panel provides a good level of independent challenge and scrutiny.
- Foster carers, staff and managers work well with other professionals to provide good all-round support to children.
- Managers have a clear understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses and are ambitious to keep learning and developing.
- The agency provides an excellent overview of children's academic outcomes and progress.
- Children are supported by the agency to remain in their foster families on a 'staying put' arrangement when they reach adulthood.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Foster carer reviews are not taking place every 12 months as required.
- Children's records are not always updated in a timely way to reflect current issues and risks.
- Panel membership is not diverse. It does not entirely reflect the needs of the foster carers they are seeking to recruit, or the wider community.
- Foster carers do not have a clear policy on managing challenging behaviour regarding holding and restraining children.
- Foster carers who work full time are not able to easily access training.
- The children's guide does not contain all the required details.

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
The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent not more than a year after approval and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28(1)(2))	28/02/2019

Recommendations

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This specifically relates to risk assessments being updated in a timely way to reflect any new information or decisions. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 14, paragraph 4.5)
- Ensure that the children's guide informs children how they can contact Ofsted should they wish to raise a concern with inspectors. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 33, paragraph 16.4)
- Ensure that the fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 13, paragraph 3.8)
- Ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 41, paragraph 20.8)
- Ensure that as far as practicable, panel membership reflects the issues under consideration, and so should as appropriate reflect the diversity of the local community. (Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4 page 39, paragraph 5.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Foster carers are well prepared to care for the children that have been placed with them. Prospective carers' assessments are thorough and reports are clear and of a good quality. Well-prepared foster carers who are subject to rigorous assessments provide good-quality care to children.

Matching is appropriate and considered. As a result, placement stability is good. This is because children's needs are matched well with the skills and abilities of their foster carers. For example, the agency has placed a deaf child with a foster carer who is also deaf. The carer has an excellent understanding of the child's needs. Consequently, the child is thriving in his placement and his social worker has commented that the carer offers him 'good wrap-around care'.

The agency supports foster carers well and responds appropriately to their needs. For example, one foster carer has two highly trained British sign language interpreters for training sessions. He also has a signing buddy who can accompany him in the evenings and support him in communicating and socialising with other foster carers. The foster carer stated, 'This has been invaluable in making me feel included and supported. I am able to ask questions to other foster carers in training sessions and gain new knowledge, insights and strategies that I can use to improve [child's] independence and quality of life.'

Children make good progress in their foster placements. They are doing well at school and in their health and development. All children have appropriate educational placements and attendance for all children is over 97%. Furthermore, 100% of children move on from school to further education or employment. One child's social worker said, 'The agency is amazing and foster carers are amazing. Foster carers have a good grasp of the young person's needs and go over and above in their care.'

Foster carers are resolute in challenging professionals to ensure that the children they have placed with them receive the best possible care. For example, one foster carer has worked closely with health professionals for the young person she has placed with her and has advocated strongly on her behalf to get her the healthcare and support she needs. The young person's social worker said, 'The foster carer advocated on her behalf brilliantly.'

Children are supported well in their transitions to alternative placements. For example, foster carers work closely with children's social workers and adopters to support children moving into their permanent homes. Foster carers encourage children to develop independence skills and help them move into independent living when the time is right. Some children are also supported well by the agency to remain in their foster families on a 'staying put' arrangement when they reach adulthood.

The agency has a charity fund that can be accessed by children or carers to help them both practically and emotionally. The fund has been used to support a mother and her baby move into their own accommodation. The charity fund has also

enabled the agency to purchase specialised software for a child's computer to assist him with his dyslexia.

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

Children are safe and protected from harm. Foster carers have all the information that they need to safely care for the children placed with them. Most children's risk assessments and risk management plans are clear and are updated to reflect the children's current situations. However, in one case the records were not updated quickly after a missing from home incident. This is a recording shortfall and the child's foster carers are aware of the actions needed to keep the child safe.

Safeguarding is integral to foster carers' assessments and in their training. This includes current issues, such as extremism and child sexual exploitation. Good training enables the foster carers to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect on the children. Furthermore, it makes them aware of the necessary steps to take to safeguard children in their care. The agency has also introduced a sexual exploitation screening tool to aid identification of risk to children.

Foster carers and the agency respond well to children who go missing. Processes have been strengthened since the last inspection. Children's profiles and trigger plans are in place and are known to all necessary agencies.

Managers and supervising social workers act swiftly and contact the appropriate professionals in respect of any safeguarding concerns. This ensures that information is shared quickly and the response to concerns is well coordinated.

Managers monitor unplanned endings of placements. They have revised their post-allegation procedures and have started to develop reflective learning procedures following placement breakdowns.

The recruitment of staff and foster carers is thorough and ensures that all are safe to work with children.

Foster carers rarely hold or restrain children. However, the policy seen on promoting positive behaviour is contradictory and does not make it clear that foster carers should be trained prior to restraining children. This is confusing and potentially could lead to foster carers holding children inappropriately.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency has foster carers situated across the country who are supervised by social workers in their area. Since the last inspection, the agency has had a significant change in leadership and management. The registered manager is supported by two operational managers, covering the north and south of the country.

Managers have a clear understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses and are ambitious to keep learning and developing. For example, they are creating foster carer forums to develop consultation with foster carers. Children continue to have access to the agency's 'Kidzrep' through a dedicated webpage and helpline facility.

Managers and staff work well with other professionals and actively challenge others when children are not receiving the service that they need. This promotes children's progress and well-being.

Continuity of staff is a strength of the agency and results in consistency for both foster carers and children. Staff receive regular supervision and feel supported by their managers. Managers feel well supported by senior managers and have commented that the responsible individual has 'brought in a culture of interaction between us on the ground and the board'.

Staff benefit from a good training programme that is also available to panel members. Staff can access external specialist training and enjoy group supervision and learning. The agency is committed to the development of staff and foster carers, and is in the process of introducing the secure base model of practice to develop practice and outcomes for children.

There is also a wide range of training available for foster carers. However, this is not always accessible to foster carers who work. As result, some foster carers who work full time are not able to avail themselves of the training that is on offer.

The agency employs two education advisors who provide an excellent overview of children's academic outcomes and progress. They access current research into the attainment of children looked after to try to understand why they are not achieving better outcomes in education. The advisors provide support to foster carers and children in education meetings and support young people with their university applications.

The agency is meeting the aims and objectives of its statement of purpose. There are currently two children's guides aimed at different age groups. These inform children of what to expect when they are placed with foster carers. However, these guides do not give children the correct telephone number of the regulator should children wish to contact them about any concerns.

The agency's fostering panel provides a good level of independent scrutiny. Members are insightful and challenging. This helps to ensure that assessments are completed to a high standard and foster carers are of a high calibre. The panel chair is experienced and knowledgeable and the agency decisions are timely. However, foster carer reviews are not taking place within a 12-month period as required. Panel members are experienced and knowledgeable. However, membership is not diverse. The agency is aware of this and is trying to recruit members from wider backgrounds to reflect the needs of children, foster carers and the wider community.

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: SC036963

Registered provider: The Foster Care Co-operative Limited

Registered provider address: The Foster Care Co-operative, Penny Hall, The Haysfield, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 1GF

Responsible individual: Sumerjit Ram

Registered manager: Steven Field

Telephone number: 01684 892380

Email address: duty@fostercarecooperative.co.uk

Inspector

Sue Young, 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: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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