

Parent and Child Fostering Assessments

Parent and Child Fostering Assessments Ltd

Alpha House, Molesey Road, Walton-on-Thames KT12 3PD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The service offers parent and child foster placements. Independent parenting assessments are carried out during short-term placements.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since June 2015. At the time of this inspection, there were 19 placements and 15 approved foster carers.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 April 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 24 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Serious and widespread failures identified at this inspection have resulted in children being exposed to harm. Following the inspection, the provider has been issued with two compliance notices, one relating to safeguarding children and the other to the fitness of the registered manager.

Foster carer supervisions are provided by unqualified staff. Serious concerns regarding some foster carers' conduct are not promptly recognised or addressed. This has resulted in children being exposed to harmful behaviour from foster carers.

Independent social workers are commissioned to undertake assessments of prospective foster carers. These assessments do not demonstrate enough professional curiosity. Significant life events experienced by prospective foster carers are not adequately considered. As a result, the potential for foster carers to understand how their own life experiences may impact on the role of fostering remains unexplored. Inspectors also found that ex-partners of prospective carers are not routinely contacted as part of the assessment process, with insufficient rationale for this.

Not enough consideration is given to how fostering will impact on birth children. One birth child has witnessed difficult behaviours from a parent and child placement.

The agency does not recruit foster carers who are culturally representative of the parents and children placed with them. In one case, a professional raised concerns that parents had been unfairly judged based on the strongly held beliefs of foster carers and the registered manager. The registered manager failed to challenge effectively some foster carers who restricted areas of their home. Several complaints have been made by families who have felt unwelcome or who have been restricted in using basic facilities such as toilets and shared areas.

Although one respite carer has been recruited since the last inspection, plans for respite are not well thought out. In one example, a parent was not given sufficient notice of the foster carer going away. Furthermore, no prior introductions took place with respite carers, resulting in the children being distressed when a stranger collected them from school.

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

The registered manager does not demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to report and manage allegations effectively. For instance, she has failed to ensure that external agencies are aware of significant events. When allegations are made against carers, they are not consistently reported to the local authority designated officer. When information has been shared with Ofsted, reports are not sent in a timely way, are of poor quality and essential information is missing. Furthermore,

when independent social workers have been commissioned to investigate complaints and allegations, the reports demonstrate poor quality investigations. As a result, some complaints and allegations remain unresolved.

Before this inspection, Ofsted received concerns relating to safeguarding and health and safety matters in some foster carers' homes. The agency was already aware of some of these concerns. However, leaders failed to take effective action. For example, referrals to external safeguarding partners were not made and the concerns were not investigated. Consequently, investigations relating to the concerns raised concluded that children had suffered harm.

Assessment processes are poor and some foster carers' homes are not safe. For example, a potentially harmful obstacle was noted in one home. In another home, two young children accessed corrosive chemicals that were not stored safely. These children suffered harm as a result. The registered manager's review of this incident did not identify that it could have been avoided if the home environment had been appropriately assessed before fostering started. Nor was any learning identified.

The registered manager has failed to ensure that parents and children have been placed with foster carers who are trained in paediatric first aid. There have been two complaints from parents regarding foster carers' responses to their children's health concerns and accidents. Children with special needs, vulnerable inexperienced parents and new-born babies have lived with foster carers who were not sufficiently trained. In April 2023 some fosters had started paediatric first aid training. However, the provider failed to ensure that this training took place at the earliest opportunity following COVID-19 restrictions being lifted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Managerial oversight is poor. The registered manager does not understand the agency's strengths and areas for development. A range of recommendations from the previous inspection remain unmet. This demonstrates poor leadership and management.

The registered manager does not keep accurate records of work that is completed by the agency. This further undermines the functioning of the agency. For example, when supervising social workers have needed to talk to foster carers about concerns, there is no record of such meetings. Furthermore, there is no quality control or oversight of the work that the registered manager undertakes herself. For instance, stage 1 checks of fostering assessments completed by the registered manager do not demonstrate the rationale for taking prospective foster carers through to the next stage.

In addition to weak assessments of foster carers, the fostering panel process fails to demonstrate rigour. When questions and issues are raised, there is not enough exploration, for example, when considering potential carers' strong views and how these may impact on children. Additionally, there is no formal process for the agency decision-maker to raise queries or concerns.

The panel lacks diversity. There is still no representation from a care-experienced person and there are no men on the panel. This is of particular concern given that the agency specialises in parent and child assessments. Many of the parents are vulnerable and care experienced and their views are not well represented on the panel.

There continues to be no deputy manager; this was also raised at the last inspection. When concerns regarding foster carers' conduct are raised, the agency fails to complete standards of care investigations or return foster carers to panel for a review. As a result, risks to children and parents living with foster carers are not reduced.

The agency's statement of purpose is unclear and misleading. It refers to a board of directors when no such board exists. It also states that the agency will recruit carers from diverse backgrounds, when this does not happen in practice. For instance, one social worker commented that the agency should consider more diversity when recruiting foster carers.

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
*A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so. A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person— having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it— has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 7 (1) (2)(b)(i))	11 June 2023
*The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's— wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11 (a)(b)(i)(ii)) Specifically, ensure that the fostering environment is free from avoidable hazards prior to children being are placed there. Additionally, ensure that the rationale for decision -making regarding the matching of foster carers' skills, training and experience demonstrates how the foster carers will meet the	11 June 2023

needs of the parents and children being placed with them and is clearly recorded. Also, that the registered manager and all staff are familiar with and act in accordance with safeguarding procedures. In particular, the agency must follow their own policy.	
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17) Specifically, all foster carers must be trained in paediatric first aid before having new-born babies placed with them. Additionally, all foster carers must be supervised by a qualified social worker as stated in NMS 21.8.	2 July 2023
The fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. The fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel. (Regulation 23 (1) (7)) Specifically, ensure that a care-experienced person participates in each panel.	2 July 2023
The functions of the fostering panel in respect of cases referred to it by the fostering service provider are— to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent, where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given, to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate— on the first review carried out in accordance with regulation 28(2), and	2 July 2023

on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service provider in accordance with regulation 28(5), and to consider any case referred to it under regulation 27(9) or 28(10). (Regulation 25 (1)(a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(d)) Specifically, panel must demonstrate a robust process, where questions that are raised are resolved. Furthermore, a specific system must be implemented that ensures the agency decision-maker's questions are returned to the next panel, feature clearly on the agenda and are evidenced and actioned. Furthermore, when concerns regarding foster carers' conduct arise, they must be returned to panel for a review.	
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. The fostering service provider— must obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family, and any other information they consider relevant, must interview at least two persons nominated by X to provide personal references for X, and prepare written reports of the interviews, except where the fostering service provider is a local authority and X lives in the area of that authority, must consult with, and take into account the views of, the local authority in whose area X lives, Having regard to the information obtained under paragraph (2), the fostering service provider must— consider whether X is suitable to be a foster parent and whether X's household is suitable for any child, prepare a written report on X which includes the matters set out in paragraph (4), and	2 July 2023

The report referred to in paragraph (3) must include the following matters in relation to X— the information required by Schedule 3 and any other information the fostering service provider consider relevant, the fostering service provider's assessment of X's suitability to be a foster parent. (Regulation 26 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c) (3)(a)(b) (4)(a)(b)) Specifically, ensure that the assessment process is thorough and potential foster carers' life experiences and circumstances are fully assessed. Evidence the efforts and decisions regarding contacting ex-partners and ensure that consideration is given to how foster carers' strongly held beliefs might impact on the fostering role.	
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3))	2 July 2023
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. Notifications must be made via the online system in a timely manner and contain clear and full information. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))	2 July 2023
The fostering service provider must—	2 July 2023

keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a)(b))	
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*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

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: 1156149

Registered provider: Parent and Child Fostering Assessments Ltd

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Inspectors

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Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

Amanda Maxwell, His Majesty's Inspector

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