

Parent and Child Fostering Assessments

Parent and Child Fostering Assessments Ltd

Alfa 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 10 placements and 14 approved foster carers.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 February 2020

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: 6 June 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

Parents and their children benefit from having supportive foster carers, and make good progress from their starting points. This is despite arriving at their placements with a range of complex issues, which may include drug use and mental health concerns. Many parents engage well with foster carers and continue to care for their children on leaving the foster placement. When parents are not able to continue to care for their children, placement endings are handled with care and sensitivity.

Foster carers support parents to develop positive routines and care skills. This is important, given the young age of the children in placement. Children benefit from this consistency, and records show that they meet their developmental milestones. Foster carers support the parents to undertake a range of care tasks for their children, including feeding, bathing and attending medical appointments. Achieving these tasks helps the parents to develop self-esteem and to access important community support services.

Parents and foster carers quickly form trusting relationships with each other. Foster carers use 'reflective conversations' in placements. These conversations, which take place within a supportive environment, offer parents an opportunity to explore their wishes and feelings and their challenging life histories.

However, despite families receiving a warm welcome in placements, key documentation requires updating. The children's guide is not appropriate for the age group served by the agency, and the parents' guide does not outline the use of baby monitors in placements.

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

Foster carers reported that they were feeling well prepared for the fostering task. They are motivated and value their role in supporting and informing parenting assessments. Foster carers are skilled and remain child-centred, while also offering support to parents.

Effective training and support give foster carers the tools that they need to support complex and difficult placements. One carer referred to the benefit of a recent course on child development, and another referred to the support from a local hospital on specialist feeding techniques for a child. Foster carers use their own knowledge and skills to support parents and their children. For example, one foster carer encouraged a parent to avoid accessing social media, as this may have a negative influence.

Feedback from key professionals is positive. Placing social workers praised the positive impact of placements. One social worker and a presiding judge commented on the stability achieved by a parent during a difficult set of care proceedings and a parenting assessment.

Multi-agency work is effective and liaison with key professionals is positive. Foster carers are aware of individual safeguarding risks, such as contact with a violent ex-partner, and they safeguard parents and children effectively. Social workers pass on important information, such as the outcomes of court proceedings, to alert foster carers and to enable them to prepare accordingly.

Placement plans and risk assessments are clear and are structured well. These documents focus on foster carers developing a sense of trust with parents in the first instance. Plans evidence key moments of vulnerability, such as bath time, and the levels of supervision required when parents leave the placement with their children. Some case records do not fully evidence the checks made by foster carers and the use of 'reflective conversations' to engage parents.

The agency lacks effective and assessed respite provision. This is of concern given the challenging nature of some placements. At present, the agency uses support workers to provide support when foster carers are absent from the placement for extended periods of time. These workers lack formal training in the fostering role.

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

The registered manager struggles to fulfil her management role while overseeing a large amount of the support and supervision of foster carers. The lack of a deputy manager limits succession planning and the delegation of management tasks. Despite this, the registered manager is highly committed and driven by the unique and hugely important role that foster carers play in supporting the parents and children who use this service. She is central to the functioning of the agency, and is valued by both the small staff team and the foster carers.

The registered manager understands the concerns expressed during this inspection, and is committed to a programme of improvement.

Placement matching requires improvement and is of concern, given the high level of placement turnover. The agency does not have a formal written procedure to evidence matching decisions. These important decisions are overly reliant on the knowledge and experience of the registered manager.

Management monitoring of the service is poor. Monitoring reports lack an evaluation of placement outcomes, feedback from families and foster carers' training needs and progress. One foster carer failed to complete the training course for foster carers within the required timescale.

The registered manager advocates effectively for foster carers and challenges placing authorities promptly when concerns arise. She takes appropriate action to end placements when safeguarding issues cannot be addressed. However, Ofsted did not receive a notification regarding a recent concern; this limited the preparation for this inspection.

The statement of purpose needs to be revised, as it does not accurately evidence the services and support provided by the agency. The agency development plan is extremely limited in detail.

The effectiveness of the panel is limited by the poor quality of the panel minutes and the variable quality of assessments. Not all assessments explore in enough detail the history of prospective foster carers, and more professional curiosity is required. The panel suffers from the lack of a care-experienced adult and the alternating of assessing social workers, which limits consistency. A recent change in the agency decision-maker has improved the scrutiny and oversight of the panel.

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
19: Staffing of fostering service The fostering service provider must ensure that there are enough suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to— the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19(a)(b)) To ensure that respite care is provided by workers who are properly assessed and approved by the agency panel.	31/05/2020
36: Notifiable events 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. Any oral notification made in accordance with this regulation must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36(1)(2))	31/05/2020

Recommendations

■ 25: Managing effectively & monitoring

The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months;
- monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 25.7)

■ 16: Statement of Purpose & child's guide

The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 16.2)

■ 20: Learning and development of carers

Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 20.2)

■ 11: Preparation for a placement

The service has and implements clear procedures for introducing children into the foster care placement, to the foster carer and to others living in the household, which cover planned and, where permitted, emergency/immediate foster care placements. They help children understand what to expect from living in the foster home. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 11.1)

This is with reference to including more detail in the parent's guide as to how the carer will contribute to the planned assessment, specifically the use of baby monitors.

■ 26: Records

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)

This is with specific reference to ensuring that foster carers accurately record their attempts to contact mothers when they are away from the placement, and record their use of 'reflective conversations'.

■ 18: Financial viability

The registered provider has a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the service's current operation and resource. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 18.2)

■ 25: Managing effectively & monitoring

The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 25.2)

■ 14: Fostering panels & decision-maker

Ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that

are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 14.8)

In particular, the agency is to ensure that panel membership is expanded and benefits from the input of a care-experienced young person.

■ 14: Fostering panels & decision-maker

The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 14.7)

■ 16: Statement of Purpose & child's guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 16.3)

■ 15: Matching the child

The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 15.1)

In particular, ensure that matching decisions consider the previous history of the carer and their ability to manage the proposed placement.

■ 13: Recruiting & assessing foster carers

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 to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party 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)

This relates to the variable quality of assessments before panel and the need to explore in greater detail the history of the applicant and the impact on their ability to care.

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

Registered provider address: Alfa House, Molesey Road, Walton on Thames
KT12 3PD

Responsible individual: Ann Kabega

Registered manager: Oyeladun Areoye

Telephone number: 01932 226 032

Email address: info@parentandchildfosteringassessments.co.uk

Inspectors

Barnaby Dowell, Social Care Inspector
Patrick Sullivan, 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: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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