

Fostering Innovations

Fostering Innovations Limited

Suite Number 207, Uxbridge House, Uxbridge Road, Hayes UB4 0SD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Innovations was established in September 2014 to provide fostering services to children and young people who are in need as outlined within the Children Act 1989 and from the statutory guidance, regulations and national minimum standard of 2011.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 November 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: first inspection

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children experience stable placements where they feel settled and can build trusting relationships with their foster carers.
- Children make good progress from their starting points and experience good opportunities in their foster homes.
- Leaders and managers take a 'hands on' approach within the agency. They know all the foster carers and children well.
- Foster carers are well prepared for fostering through their preparation training. They can also access an ongoing training programme that is relevant to the children that they are caring for.
- Foster carers feel welcomed in this agency. They value the excellent communication and feel included by the agency's approach towards them.
- Foster carers feel well supported by the agency, both via their own supervising social workers and by the leaders and managers running the agency.
- Staff experience the agency as a learning environment. They feel well supported by regular supervision and have access to good-quality training.
- Children's safeguarding needs are a priority. Staff and foster carers understand what to do to keep children as safe as possible, including how to access guidance, policy, procedures and a duty system when necessary.
- Communication within the agency and, more widely, with safeguarding partners, helps to keep children safe and enhance their progress in their foster homes.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Two shortfalls were found in the service. These relate to the need to more carefully consider and clearly record the reasons for each match. This will help the agency to fully understand safeguarding risks and the impact that these may have on existing children in placement.
- Explore the agency protocol for notifying the regulator of significant events, and to ensure that they are made in a timely way which promotes the safety of children, foster carers and staff.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that 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 and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 15.1)
- Ensure the registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 29.1)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency's approach to communication, engagement and support of its foster carers results in children experiencing more stable placements. Such placements enable trusted and secure relationships to grow between children, their foster carers and families. One commissioning social worker said that she placed a child who had previously been to numerous foster homes and this was the longest placement he had stayed in and was doing well.

Communication and relationships are strengths of this agency and have been key in building sound support networks for children. Children and young people have been able to make and sustain relationships which have supported them to make progress, learn and develop safely.

Foster carers talk with great pride about the progress children and young people make while living in their care. Children and young people are making good progress from their starting points. Examples are achieving grade As in GCSE subjects, improving confidence, learning new language skills and passing business studies courses with merit and distinction.

Children and young people are helped back into education at the earliest opportunity and are supported to continue to learn while school or college placements are being sought. Most children and young people are in full-time education in either school or college with a high level of engagement and attendance.

Foster carers ensure that children and young people's basic healthcare needs are met by enrolling them at the local health surgery and ensuring that health appointments are attended. Wider or more specialist health services are sought with the help of the agency and placing authority if needed, for example from child and adolescent mental health services.

Children and young people spoken to said that they were happy living at their foster homes. They described positive relationships with their foster families and they said that they felt included in activities, family life and holidays. Children and young people said that they knew who to talk to if they were not happy in their foster placements. The agency has redesigned a children's guide which includes helpful information about advocates and how to complain. In addition, a mentor is being employed to support and advocate for children and young people living with the agency's foster carers.

Children and young people experience good-quality care, where they enjoy new experiences and have opportunities to learn new skills. These include going on holiday abroad, learning to swim and attending after-school clubs, such as football, athletics, music and netball.

Older children and young people are supported to learn skills for living independently, such as cooking, budgeting, shopping and travelling independently. They are given good support to move to semi-independent living placements, and many fostered young people continue to return to their foster carers as young adults.

to stay in touch or seek advice.

Foster carers describe feeling welcomed by the agency. Many say that they chose to foster for this agency because they liked the small, family feel approach. Foster carers felt that the training and assessment process has left them well prepared to manage the challenges of fostering. They enjoy the ongoing training which is organised at times when they can easily attend. Overall, foster carers like fostering for this agency and they appreciate the supervising social work support and the 'hands on' approach of the leaders and managers.

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

Children spoken to said that they felt safe in their foster placements. The stability of placements and positive relationships enables open and honest discussions about difficulties or worries and helps to keep children and young people safe.

Placement authority referrals help to inform matching assessments, which are completed at the point a placement is requested. The matching risk assessment identifies risks and considers strategies to protect children and young people. Records indicate that practice is not yet consistent enough in this area and closer consideration of existing children and young people in placement is needed. However, all children and young people have individual risk assessments which clearly indicate any known issues and give strategies to reduce risk.

Where children present unsafe behaviours, foster carers are quick to identify this and communicate concerns with the agency. The agency is proactive in requesting placement stability or strategy meetings with professionals to ensure that actions or protective factors are discussed and implemented.

All carers have 'safer' caring plans in place and are supported to think about safe caring when looking after someone else's child. Health and safety checks in the home are undertaken as part of the fostering assessment process and are regularly updated.

Foster carers are guided by clear policies and procedures and by the support that they receive from their supervising social workers. This helps them to understand what they need to do if they have any safeguarding concerns about the children and young people they care for. Targeted training helps foster carers to understand the needs of children who may be at risk from external factors or their own behaviours, for example exploitation, risk of radicalisation, challenging behaviour, mental health and emotional well-being.

Foster carers spoken to were aware of what they needed to do when/if children and young people go missing. They have guidance, training and access to an out-of-hours duty system for advice. They understand what is required for each child, depending on strategies agreed with placing authorities and supervising social workers on when to report to the police or emergency duty teams. The agency and the foster carers are aware of the local runaway and missing from home and care protocol and the process for requesting return home interviews when young people return.

The agency is aware of safe recruitment practice and understands the need to

ensure that appropriate checks and safeguards are in place to protect children from adults who may seek to harm them. The recruitment, assessment, preparation and training for foster carers has a strong focus on keeping children safe. Staff are similarly vetted as part of the agency's safe recruitment practice.

Notifications of significant incidents to the regulator have not always been timely. Although this has not placed any children or young people at immediate risk, delays in this process mean that the regulator is not able to know what is happening or intervene if necessary. Timely notifications ensure an additional layer of protection for children, young people, foster carers and staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are visible and work closely with their small, but growing, team. Both the responsible individual and the registered manager are social work qualified, have lengthy experience in the field of fostering and are motivated and passionate about the service that they want to provide. The registered manager is enrolled on the level five diploma in leadership and management, children and families.

Leaders and managers are well respected by their foster carers, their own staff, local authority social workers and commissioners. Many of the foster carers say that they joined this agency because they knew the leaders and managers and liked their 'hands on' approach. They say it helps them to feel supported and included in the agency.

Leaders and managers are motivated and ambitious to ensure that children have settled homes, where they can learn, be safe and achieve what they want to in life. Leaders and managers prioritise children and young people and go above and beyond at times to ensure that their needs are met. Examples of this are arranging transport by foster carers to collect children from outside the area when no one else is available, or providing family workers to ensure that a placement is supported. One commissioner said, 'They are responsive and always provide additional services when they say they will.'

Leaders and managers know the children and young people that their agency is caring for. They are aware of the children and young people's care plans and are developing support and training for foster carers to ensure that children and young people make good progress. As the agency grows, leaders and managers are developing support by employing supporting social workers and a children's mentor. The agency also has plans to recruit an educational advisor/mentor to help with school liaison, admissions and homework support.

Leaders and managers offer staff a supported work environment. Their workplace and hours are flexible to provide a good work/life balance. Staff say that they receive regular supervision, experienced a good induction and feel that there is training available for their personal development. In addition to regular supervision, there are informal practice meetings held weekly where staff can talk and reflect on the work they are doing with children, young people and foster carers.

The agency operations have progressed and grown in the past year, with a focus on

recruitment, reassessment of transferring foster carers, and recruitment of staff. Leaders and managers are aware of their strengths and are building on these, such as the support and training for foster carers. Internal monitoring of the agency is helping to inform a development plan for the progression and growth of the service. They have clear objectives about where they want to be and a realistic plan to achieve this goal.

The agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available on the agency website. The website is informative and represents what the agency does as well as offering help, support and guidance about how to become a foster parent.

The leaders and managers have many professional networks and are well respected within the wider social work community. They have pulled on these networks to support and progress their agency and are working collaboratively with professional networks in children's best interests. They are equally able to challenge the professional network on behalf of children and young people when necessary.

The agency's approach to equality and diversity is woven throughout the practice. Examples of this are within matching, children's dietary needs, and children's language needs.

The agency panel is quorate, well led by an experienced chair and is providing a good gatekeeping service for the agency. The agency decision-maker is making timely decisions and offers support and consultancy in an appropriate way to the agency.

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: 1221446

Registered provider: Fostering Innovations Limited

Registered provider address: Suite Number 207, Uxbridge House, Uxbridge Road, Hayes UB4 0SD

Responsible individual: Karuna Gupta

Registered manager: Seema Kochhar

Telephone number: 02071836997

Email address: fostering.innovations@gmail.com

Inspector

Christine Kennet, 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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