

Aspirations Fostering Limited

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Longacre Farm Business Park, Hockley, Essex SS5 5LR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Aspirations Fostering Limited is a small independent fostering agency offering care to children predominantly in Essex. At the time of the inspection, the agency was supporting 21 fostering households that were caring for 31 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in April 2019.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 June 2024

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: 29 April 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

The strength of this agency is the high level of support provided to its foster carers. Supervising social workers know their fostering families well. This enables good placement decision-making. Most children enjoy long-term stability, with the option to remain with their foster carers into adulthood, until they are ready for independent living.

Foster carers said:

- 'Aspirations is a team of professional, supportive, caring, dedicated and friendly people who appreciate the work done by the foster carer and all that is involved.'
- 'The staff listen to what we as carers say, they support our strengths and build on areas that we feel are our weaknesses.'
- 'The agency has the biggest of hearts; the priority is always the carers, children and families. We are proud to be part of such a fantastic agency.'
- '[The agency] has supported us in every way possible, especially as this is our first time as foster parents.'

Children benefit from warmth, nurture and a sense of belonging with fostering families who are committed to them. The agency increases support to foster carers and children when needed to avoid unplanned endings. When unplanned endings occur, the manager takes time to reflect with foster carers and staff to identify learning from the situation.

Foster carers have detailed knowledge of children's needs. Most children make good progress across all areas of their development, with examples of children making excellent progress from their starting points. This includes progress with their physical health and strength, speech and language and educational attainment.

Foster carers ensure that children enjoy activities based on their individual interests and passions. The agency supports children to access unique opportunities, including funding to attend an international music skills course. This helps children to grow in confidence and realise their aspirations.

Foster carers advocate for children in their best interests. Carers are supported to contribute effectively as part of the team around the child to ensure that children have the resources they need and to help shape more sensitive responses to children's emotional needs.

Many children live with their brothers and sisters. Foster carers ensure that children's voices are heard by the professionals responsible for planning family time. There are

examples of foster carers going above and beyond expectations to ensure that children spend time with their families in meaningful and natural ways. Foster carers work with children's social workers to ensure that life-story work is meaningful for the children they care for.

The agency helps children to gain independence skills by setting them individual challenges each month. These range from buying and cooking a new vegetable to using public transport and walking to school alone. The agency recognises children's uniqueness and achievements. These are routinely celebrated with children and their social workers and are captured in children's records to ensure that children have access to a record of their positive memories, now and in the future.

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

Children feel cared for by adults that they can confide in. Supervising social workers regularly spend time with children to establish positive, trusting relationships. The agency ensures that children have access to specialist support when needed to help children understand their feelings and emotions.

There are few incidents of children going missing from home. Foster carers are proactive when this occurs and ensure that information is shared effectively with other professionals. Foster carers are vigilant to changes in children's behaviour and to potential bullying or exploitation.

Allegations against foster carers are escalated appropriately with external professionals and are managed sensitively by the agency. However, on one occasion, the manager did not notify Ofsted of an emerging safeguarding concern about foster carers' practice that had been subject to consultation with the local authority designated officer.

The agency ensures that foster carers have access to training relevant to the children they care for. Foster carers complete training identified by the agency as mandatory. This includes face-to-face training in first aid and safeguarding. Safer caring training is provided to all adults in the fostering household and to connected carers. Most foster carers feel that training is accessible and of good quality.

The agency undertakes individual and environmental risk assessments to increase children's safety. This includes assessments of holiday homes owned by foster carers. However, medication and the expectations of foster carers around the administration and recording of medication is not clearly captured in children's plans. There have been a couple of incidents of one child missing medication. This was not escalated to the manager without delay, to enable clear management oversight and action.

Assessments of prospective foster carers are suitable. Assessments are balanced and include exploration of applicants' strengths and vulnerabilities. Foster panel provides adequate scrutiny that contributes to the quality assurance of the agency's recruitment and review processes. Members of the foster panel bring relevant varied

experience to their roles. The agency is in the process of recruiting additional members to improve panel's cultural and gender diversity. Foster panel minutes are clearly written. However, they do not reference what documents have been reviewed to inform the panel's recommendation and they do not always reflect the agency's adopted approach of using 'language that cares'.

The agency has established an appropriate safer recruitment policy. However, gaps in new members of staff's employment are not consistently explored. While the risks were mitigated as the applicants were well known to the management team, this practice does not ensure that all required action is taken to reduce the risk of unsuitable individuals being employed to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by an appropriately qualified and experienced manager. She has embedded a culture of warmth and family values that is evident in the support provided to the foster carers and in the care of the children.

The manager has a good knowledge of the fostering households and the children that they care for. She maintains a detailed overview through continued direct work with children and foster carers and by taking the lead with unannounced visits. Children talk about the manager and recall times that they have met with her. Foster carers feel that she is accessible, approachable and a good advocate for them.

Supervising social workers enjoy their roles and feel fully supported by each other and the management team. Staff's professional development is encouraged and supported. There are processes in place for cascading new knowledge throughout the agency.

The manager is reflective and responsive to feedback from foster panel and other professionals. The manager has met all the requirements from the last Ofsted inspection and has a clear development plan for the continual improvement of the agency.

Adequate management monitoring systems are in place. However, these have not always ensured that information is accessible to the manager without delay. Shortfalls in the recording system were addressed during the inspection to ensure that information is routed directly to the manager.

External professionals are positive about the practice of the manager and her team. Multi-agency working is excellent, with effective communication and consultation. The agency organises team around the child meetings when necessary to ensure that children's needs are met.

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, The 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 not— employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person— is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(c)) This specifically relates to ensuring that gaps in employment have been identified and satisfactorily explored.	9 July 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that prescribed medication is only given to the child in accordance with the prescription. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 6.10)
- The registered person should oversee that 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 panel's recommendation. In particular, ensure that it is clear what information has been

reviewed to inform the panel's recommendation. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)

- The registered person should have a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. This specifically relates to ensuring notifications are consistently submitted in line with this policy. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 29.1)

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: 1227778

Registered provider: Aspirations Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Longacre Farm Business Park, Hockley, Essex SS5 5LR

Responsible individual: Kenneth Johnson

Registered manager: Joanna King

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Inspectors

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector
Majella Russell, Social Care Inspector

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