

Aim High Fostering Services

Aim High Fostering Services Ltd

M25 Business Centre Ltd, 121 Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey EN9 1JH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This small independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted on 7 October 2016. At the time of this inspection, the agency was supporting 15 fostering households caring for 20 children, primarily across North and East London and neighbouring counties.

The current manager was registered with Ofsted on 10 July 2023.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 July 2024

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: 14 February 2022

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 agency supports foster carers to provide good care. Most children are settled and make steady progress from their starting points. When a child starts to become unsettled, staff are quick to increase their support to the foster carer and the child. This includes working closely with all the relevant professionals.

When possible, children benefit from planned moves to their new fostering households. This happens at a pace that is right for the child and involves spending time with birth children. Staff support children to complete a booklet called 'Get to know me'. This helps the child to share their views about what is important to them. However, the agency does not always provide children who need to move quickly with information about their new fostering household in an accessible format before they move in.

Foster carers are encouraged to keep in touch with children when they move on. This helps reduce children's feelings of rejection and supports children to enjoy long-term connections with adults who have cared for them. Staff support foster carers to offer 'staying put' arrangements for children who want to remain after their 18th birthday. Some children now act as support carers for their foster carers. This is testament to the enduring positive relationships foster carers have built with children.

All children have an education provision and are supported with their learning. Foster carers have a good knowledge of the best early years provisions in their area. This enables children with developmental delay to improve their social interaction skills in a supportive environment.

One child has a reduced timetable of education and has experienced exclusions from school. This is appropriately challenged by staff with the virtual school. Staff have advocated well for the child and have ensured that the child has had access to an independent advocate. Another child is now attending school after a prolonged period of refusing to attend. This is supported by regular and effective communication between the school and the foster carer.

Foster carers ensure that children attend all health appointments for their physical and emotional health. Foster carers are responsive to children's health needs and act on advice they receive from specialist health professionals.

A dedicated participation worker leads on group activities. Staff regularly celebrate children's achievements with recognition awards and tokens. Birth children receive the same level of care and attention as fostered children to ensure that they feel appreciated for their contributions to fostering.

The directors have purchased a caravan for the use of foster carers. This was with the clear aim that all children will enjoy a holiday at least once a year. Foster carers

and children value this additional resource. Foster carers also support children to enjoy a range of hobbies and fun activities, as well as enrichment activities such as singing and dancing.

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

Managers have addressed safeguarding issues raised at the previous monitoring visit. Managers have reviewed the composition of all fostering households, implemented specific safeguarding training for foster carers and staff, and updated safer caring practices and policies.

Agency staff have attended refresher training on identifying and escalating allegations. Supervising social workers remain curious about children's experiences and increase visits to fostering households when needed. This includes targeted unannounced visits to observe foster carers and children's interactions at specific times of the day.

All foster carers have completed safeguarding, safer caring and first-aid training. Managers have purchased a training package for all support carers to complete to ensure that all adults caring for a fostered child have an appropriate level of understanding about the role and how to care for children safely. Household safer caring plans contain information on the foster carer's support network. However, on one occasion, a safer caring plan was not adapted for children staying overnight with a support carer, in line with the agency's safer care policy.

Children feel safe at home and in the community. Foster carers and staff have a good understanding of children's vulnerabilities. There are examples of professionally written safer care plans that are individual to the child. These include strategies agreed with children. This provides children with greater ownership of their plans to keep them safe and helps children understand what adults are worried about.

Foster carers manage incidents of children going missing from home well and in line with plans agreed with the child's social worker. Supervising social workers have a good knowledge of the risks of exploitation and are proactive in escalating concerns to other professionals.

Foster carers involve children in completing an individualised digital passport to help educate them about the benefits and risks of the internet. This helps shape conversations with children about online safety and ensures clear rules are in place about the use of different electronic devices and social media sites.

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

The registered manager, who is completing the required leadership and management qualification, is supported by a dedicated senior management team. Foster carers feel understood and valued by the agency, as the director and members of the team have themselves fostered for many years.

The agency has experienced an unsettled period in the last six months. The management team remained consistent and committed throughout this time. As a result, most foster carers said that they were unaffected by the changes due to the hands-on support that was offered by managers during this time.

Due to the redirection of managers' time, management oversight has declined. There are gaps in management monitoring systems, including the monitoring of medication administered to children. Not all children have delegated authority or local authority care plans. While an escalation policy is in place, it has not been implemented effectively.

Foster carers and supervising social workers know children well and attend all relevant meetings. However, little information is recorded of the actions that have been agreed at statutory meetings. This undermines the effective monitoring of children's progress.

The manager provides good-quality supervision to staff. Foster carer supervision is regular and encourages foster carers to reflect. However, on one occasion, there was a period when supervision did not take place in the home. This did not provide the agency with assurances about the safety of the home environment or provide observations or the views of the children being cared for. The practice of virtual supervision had not been identified by managers.

Not all foster carers have completed their training, support and development (TSD) standards induction within the required timescale. A plan is in place to address this, with a supervising social worker dedicated to helping foster carers complete this training. Foster carers find the training offered by the agency helpful. A focus group of foster carers participated in identifying and evaluating a new training provider.

Foster carers' annual reviews are detailed. They include children's views and feedback from a range of professionals who comment on the child's progress.

Managers have established a fostering panel that is diverse in experience and led by a well-experienced panel chair. The fostering panel provides appropriate challenge and exercises its independence when considering the suitability of applicants wanting to foster.

The agency has appropriate safer recruitment practices. However, managers do not consistently verify why a person left their previous care roles.

The management team knows the strengths and areas for development of the agency. A clear action plan is in place for continued improvement, with new policies and practices in the process of implementation. Managers are responsive and knowledgeable, and acted immediately to resolve shortfalls that were identified during the inspection. Recent successful recruitment has provided greater resilience in the team to ensure that consistency to foster carers is secured.

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 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. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, ensure that management information is accurately collated and allows for monitoring and review of compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the child's care plan, and medication, medical treatment and first aid administered to any child placed with foster parents.	30 August 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements. In particular, ensure that safer care plans are completed when children stay overnight with support carers, in line with the agency's own safer care policy. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.1)
- The registered person should ensure that unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 23, paragraph 11.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This specifically relates to verifying reasons why applicants left previous care roles. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 38, paragraph 19.2)

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the TSD standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 40, paragraph 20.3)
- The registered provider should ensure that supervision meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings. 'Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)

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: 1241499

Registered provider: Aim High Fostering Services Ltd

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Inspectors

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

Thobekile Bandama, Social Care Inspector

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