

Elite Fostering Limited

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International House, 963 Wolverhampton Road, Oldbury, West Midlands B69 4RJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ofsted registered Elite Fostering Limited in December 2018. The agency has two registered managers, one of whom is also a director of this agency. The agency undertakes the recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. The agency currently has 58 fostering families and 117 children placed.

Inspection dates: 26 February to 1 March 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: 27 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff and managers know all of the foster carers well, including their individual skills, culture, location and availability. Foster carers told inspectors that staff and managers discuss in detail potential placements with them to ensure that there is a good match. As a result, the agency makes placements only when foster carers can reasonably be expected to meet children's needs. However, some matching documents reviewed in this inspection did not reflect the good work being undertaken.

New foster carers are welcomed and prepared well for the fostering task. Overall, foster carers enjoy extensive support, advice and input from their supervising social workers, support staff and managers. Support staff provide robust support for children's developing needs in placement, at times providing significant and out-of-hours support to stabilise children's placements.

Foster carers are skilled and committed to meeting children's individual needs and making a difference in children's lives. Children who have previously experienced frequent placement moves now enjoy stability. As a result, most children experience a secure base and are making good progress in all areas of their development in their foster families.

Children are well supported to do the best that they can in education. The agency's support staff provide children with additional support to stay in their existing schools when this is in their best interest. In addition, foster carers are supported to source appropriate alternative educational provision when needed. Foster carers and support staff encourage children with their studies and help them to access any additional support they need to help them achieve. Foster carers have high, yet realistic, aspirations for children because they understand the barriers that may impact on children's learning. Children also have good academic aspirations, which include progressing to college and university. Foster carers ensure that children's achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Foster carers help children to benefit from positive experiences, including holidays, hobbies, clubs and sports. They create positive memories and a sense of belonging for children. Children feel part of their foster families and the community where they live, giving them a sense of belonging and permanence. In several cases, foster carers are caring for a child along with their brothers and sisters to enable them to continue living together.

Foster carers demonstrate empathy and respect for children's birth families. They work well with placing social workers and are child-centred in supporting children to have positive visits with family, friends and those who are important to them. One sibling group was supported by their foster carers to visit the grandparents who live abroad, helping the siblings to maintain their family links.

Children are supported and encouraged by their foster carers to develop independence skills. When appropriate, they stay with their foster families after they turn 18 years old. This ensures that young adults with complex care needs can stay with their long-term foster carers into adulthood. For others, this means that they can remain living with their younger siblings or have a home to return to while studying at university. As a result, young people are fully supported to transition positively into adult life and to maintain a sense of belonging in their foster families.

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

Children are supported well by their foster carers to be safe. When there are concerns, the agency provides support for both children and their foster carers quickly. For example, one child who spent unauthorised time out in the community with people who may pose a potential risk was provided with regular one-to-one sessions by the agency to support them to talk through issues that were preventing them from returning to the foster home as expected. This support raised the child's awareness of potential risks and supported them to keep themselves safe. It also helped them to maintain a positive relationship with their foster carers.

Children said that they feel safe living with their foster carers. They have formed trusting relationships with them and generally feel that they can talk to them when needed. One child said that they get on well with their foster carers and feel that they are treated as a family member. Another child shared that they felt listened to by their foster carer, who has taught them that it is okay to feel hurt and angry.

Foster carers and the agency respond well to children who go missing from home. Return home interviews are completed promptly, providing children and their foster carers with the opportunity to explore why they go missing from home. The agency and foster carers work collaboratively with the police and placing social workers to try to reduce the level of risk. They ensure that there are clear strategies in place to promote children's safety.

When children make allegations, the agency responds well. It works in partnership with other professionals, including the local authority designated officer and placing social workers, to promote the welfare and safety of children. When there are concerns, the agency takes the matter back to the panel, and follow-up actions are completed in a timely manner.

Physical restraints are rare in this agency. However, one foster carer who had requested training in physical intervention for several months to meet a child's complex and escalating needs was not provided with this training. The agency did not ensure that safe practices were in place to safeguard the child and to provide the foster carer with the skills to meet these emerging needs.

Recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is robust. There is effective management oversight of recruitment. This helps to ensure that only adults who have undergone the required checks provide care and support to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency has undergone significant growth since its previous inspection in 2021. This has included the appointment of a second registered manager, a responsible individual, team managers and a new panel chair.

Managers and staff are suitably experienced and qualified to deliver a high-quality service to foster carers and children. Leaders and managers show an ambitious vision for the agency. Recent initiatives, such as the introduction of a therapeutic parenting training programme and a children who care support group, demonstrate a determination by managers to develop and increase positive experiences and outcomes for children.

The agency's pool of approved foster carers has also grown since the previous inspection. This is as a result of the recruitment of newly approved foster carers and experienced foster carers who have transferred from other agencies. The quality of foster carers' assessments is good. The panel ensures that there is a rigorous quality assurance process and members have the required knowledge and expertise to support the agency to make child-centred decisions. An experienced agency decision maker provides an in-depth rationale and clear decision-making. As a result, the agency benefits from strong independent oversight.

The agency has a clear transfer protocol for foster carers transferring into the agency. This ensures that carers are reassessed and have all the relevant, safer recruitment checks and references undertaken. Transferring carers' training records are reviewed as part of this process, and training plans are put in place to keep foster carers' training up to date. Currently, the agency does not have a process in place to welcome children transitioning into the agency with their foster carers. For example, one child did not receive their children's guide or fostering social worker visit for three and a half weeks after transitioning into the agency with their foster carer.

Foster carers are well supervised and supported by the agency, and they have provided positive feedback about the support they receive from the agency's supervising social workers, support staff and managers. One foster carer explained that when they faced challenges, they were able to access support from the agency any time of the day or night, and the agency signposted them to the relevant professionals. They also spoke about receiving support from the agency when attending regular team around the child meetings, which they said helped them to put in place therapeutic strategies and to understand their child's behaviours.

Supervising social workers and foster carers are provided with a wide range of good-quality training opportunities. However, some foster carers' mandatory training is incomplete, and they have not had the most up-to-date guidance to provide good-quality and safe care. The registered managers have acknowledged this and are putting a strategy in place to address this shortfall.

The agency's recent introduction of therapeutic training aims to help foster carers understand how to respond therapeutically when children have been impacted by trauma. The agency seeks to ensure that foster carers and staff are equipped to provide the right support for children. However, this is still in its infancy and is yet to be tested.

Social work and support staff are very positive about working for this agency. They report manageable caseloads that ensure that they can provide effective support to each household. They receive regular supervision sessions that are focused on children's experiences and needs. Staff said they felt well supported by a management team whose approach allows for a healthy work-life balance.

Overall, the agency's monitoring systems are robust and effective. The registered managers have a good understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for development. However, there are areas for development relating to the need for the recording to reflect actions undertaken, for example recordings of unannounced visits and in matching documents where records do not reflect practice.

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 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 (1)) In particular, ensure that all foster carers complete their mandatory training within set timescales. In addition, ensure that foster carers have access to training that enables them to meet children's complex needs.	29 April 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that before the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information should be provided in a clear, comprehensive written form. This specifically relates to matching documents containing full information to evidence the information available to both foster carers and the agency when considering a match. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 32, paragraph 15.2)
- The registered person should ensure that they have a system in place to monitor record-keeping and take action when required. This specifically relates to ensuring that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and action is taken when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.2)

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: 1280530

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Inspectors

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