

Evergreen Foster Care Service

Evergreen Foster Care Limited

S.17, Genesis Centre, North Staffs Business Park, Innovation Way, Stoke-On-Trent
ST6 4BF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A small private company owns this independent fostering agency, which was registered by Ofsted in November 2019. The agency offers care for children requiring high levels of support with moving from residential care into foster care. At the time of the inspection, there were 23 fostering households caring for 13 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in September 2024 and is suitably qualified.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 February 2025

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: 11 October 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

As part of the inspection, feedback was gathered from foster carers and the children they care for. The inspector spoke to three children who were all very happy and felt well cared for. Some children also recorded a video or sent a message to share their positive views about where they live. One child shared that they would give their home '10 out of 10'. Another child discussed that, 'Evergreen have helped me and the other kids a lot. They couldn't be any better, and I love them and my carers.' These positive comments demonstrate that children feel well cared for and supported.

Children make good progress from their starting points because of the nurturing and consistent care they receive from their foster carers. Children recognise their own progress. One child proudly shared that they now eat vegetables and healthy food, which they would never do before, and another child is achieving well at college and being supported towards adulthood.

Children live in stable home environments, which is a strength of the agency. Many of the children have previously lived in residential care or had multiple previous placements, but they now benefit from stable care. Extensive planning takes place before placements are agreed, and children benefit from bespoke transition plans that help them to settle in with their new carers.

Seven out of the 13 children live with their carers under long-term arrangements. One fostering family has applied for a special guardianship order to provide the child they care for with a greater sense of belonging. Discussions with carers clearly showed that children are considered as part of their families.

Children are supported to engage in education, and attendance is very good. When children are out of school, the agency provides effective challenge to the placing authority to secure a school place as soon as possible. Family support workers provide additional support and education-based activities, which occupies the children in a purposeful way and relieves pressure on carers.

Children enjoy a range of opportunities and activities with their foster carers, including day trips, holidays and family events. Children are also supported to pursue hobbies and interests that help them to develop a positive self-identity and make new friends. In addition, the agency arranges a number of events for children, including family picnics, gaming days, celebration events and competitions.

Children benefit from support to manage their emotions. An in-house therapist builds positive relationships with children and provides planned sessions where they can explore their feelings. The therapist is an integral part of the support for families, and they share their knowledge and understanding with carers, staff and external agencies so that children receive a consistent approach.

Children and carers benefit from a high level of respite from either agency approved carers or extended family. This helps carers to maintain their resilience but also gives the child connections to other trusted adults and widens their support network. Respite carers are thoroughly matched to children in the same way as main carers.

Foster carers speak positively about their involvement with the agency. Carers build good working relationships with their supervising social workers and feel very well supported. They value the high level of respite care that helps them to have a break from caring and the child-centred, therapeutic approach of the agency.

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

Children can identify adults who they trust and can talk to about any worries or concerns they may have. Children have good relationships with their foster carers and also enjoy spending time with the supervising social workers and family support workers. These positive relationships allow children to feel comfortable sharing their worries so that they can get the support they need.

Behaviour is well managed. All carers complete training in therapeutic care and behaviour management, which equips them with the skills they need to de-escalate situations. Physical interventions are only used as a last resort, and carers receive good support to reflect on incidents and consider their practice.

Foster carers manage risk well, and children are kept safe. Carers take a proportionate approach to online risks, and children are involved in developing strategies for when they feel overwhelmed. The agency creatively uses virtual reality to engage with older children and educate them about the risk of exploitation. Despite the good practice, children's plans do not always contain information on all known risks, and plans are not always updated following incidents or when new risks arise. Action is being taken to improve the documents so that information is presented clearly.

Staff recruitment is not always completed safely. In one case, significant gaps in employment history had not been recognised or explored. In another case, insufficient references were held on file. These gaps could potentially present a risk of unsuitable people being allowed to work with vulnerable children.

Managers and staff take action to keep children safe when concerns are raised about foster carers' practice. Decisions are made in partnership with children's placing authorities, and investigations are completed where necessary. Administrative processes in relation to allegations are not always good enough, evidence of decision-making is not always recorded and not all concerns have been correctly notified to all relevant authorities.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced manager. The manager has joined the agency since the last inspection and has built strong

relationships with staff and foster carers. Staff and carers feel very well supported and value the manager's caring approach.

The responsible individual provides good oversight and support for the agency. They were responsible for setting up the agency and were previously the registered manager. They are passionate about the therapeutic, high support model that the agency has and takes a hands-on approach. Several staff members have moved to work for the agency due to previous connections with the responsible individual, which demonstrates the respect and trust that they have in her.

Staff say that they feel well supported by managers. They receive regular reflective supervisions and appraisals, which helps to develop their practice. In addition, staff receive thorough inductions into their roles and are supported to complete specialist qualifications. One member of staff is currently completing a life-story work qualification, and two members of staff are trained as Team Teach trainers.

The fostering panel consists of appropriately qualified and experienced members who are equipped to make competent recommendations. This is supported by the agency decision-maker, who makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions, demonstrating a good level of reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process.

Carers are provided with training to enable them to meet children's needs in a therapeutic way. They undertake an extensive range of mandatory courses as well as additional training specific to the needs of the children they care for. Not all carers have completed the training, support and development standards within the required timescales, and there is a pattern of extensions being given. Although some delays have been for understandable reasons, managers do not have a robust system in place to ensure that carers are supported to complete the work within their first year of approval.

Monitoring systems are generally good; however, managers have failed to identify some shortfalls in recruitment and administrative processes. One foster carer's assessment did not contain a full employment history, and there was no evidence that all required references had been sought. Following a significant incident, managers completed a learning review but failed to identify the shortfall.

Children's plans are generally clear; however, there are some cases where there are a lot of documents missing that have been due for some time. Although these have been chased and recently escalated, the agency's action to escalate further needs to be more robust so that staff and carers can be sure that they are up to date with what is in children's plans.

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
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. (Regulation 36 (1))	11 April 2025
The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, the provider must ensure that all safer recruitment checks are completed for staff and prospective foster carers, including gathering a full employment history and ensuring that references are sought for all previous work with children or vulnerable adults.	11 April 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's plans consistently capture their needs. This specifically relates to ensuring that children's plans accurately represent their needs and any risks. It also relates to ensuring that any decisions made about a child's care are recorded on their records. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards': 26.5)

- The registered person should ensure that children's files contain their updated local authority plans. This specifically refers to ensuring that any missing documents from the child's placing authority are chased and escalated so that all relevant information is held about the child. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards': 26.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards': 20.3)

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: 2509056

Registered provider: Evergreen Foster Care Limited

Registered provider address: Genesis Business Park, Unit 18 Innovation Way,
Stoke On Trent, Staffordshire ST6 4BF

Responsible individual: Post vacant

Registered manager: Alison Gregory

Telephone number: 01782987012

Inspector

Vicky Smith, Social Care Inspector

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